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**BRITISH ATTITUDES TO THE AERIAL
BOMBARDMENT OF GERMAN CITIES
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

PAUL WEIR

PHD

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

SEPTEMBER 2014

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree. However, the thesis incorporates to the extent indicated below, material already submitted as part of required coursework and/or for the degree of Master of Arts in Modern European History which was awarded by the University of Sussex.

Signature:

Chapter Four, entitled: “‘A city of the dead’: Dresden and the end of the war”, is a reworked version of my Master of Arts dissertation, completed in 2008. The version included here incorporates original research carried out during my current period of registration at the University of Sussex. The argument has been substantially developed to situate this part of my research within the broader scope of my thesis.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

PAUL WEIR PhD

BRITISH ATTITUDES TO THE AERIAL BOMBARDMENT OF GERMAN CITIES DURING THE SECOND

WORLD WAR

SUMMARY

This thesis examines the attitudes of British people to the aerial bombardment of German cities during the Second World War, with particular attention given to those who challenged the nature of the campaign. I use contemporary sources with a strong emphasis on qualitative data to develop a picture of attitudes at the time and situate the roots of the significant post-war controversy within these contemporary attitudes. The thesis offers a more sustained and textured account of anti-bombing sentiment than other historiographical works. An introductory chapter charts the development of aerial bombing in the early years of the twentieth century. The extent to which Britain engaged with aerial bombardment, and how it was understood by people in Britain, are addressed here.

Three case studies – each focusing on a different raid on a German city – are then used to address how attitudes to the bomber offensive were shaped at different stages of the war. The first is the December 1940 attack on Mannheim. This took place during the Blitz on British cities, a factor which has implications for the nature of responses at this time. The question of reprisals is important here. I show how the desire for reprisals was far from universal, yet it was overstated in the press and by Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The second case study addresses the series of heavy attacks on Hamburg in July and August 1943. This followed the decision, taken the previous year, to officially adopt a policy of area bombing. This chapter shows how the Archbishop of Canterbury's support for the campaign stifled voices of protest at this time. The final case study considers the raids on Dresden in February 1945. Churchill's response is addressed in this chapter and contrasted with the immediate concerns raised in the press and in private diaries.

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Abbreviations

AMNS	Air Ministry News Service
BIPO	British Institute of Public Opinion
BRC	Bombing Restriction Committee
CCAC	Churchill College Archives Centre
CCO	Christ Church Library, Oxford
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LAM	Lambeth Palace Library
LSF	Library of the Society of Friends
MO-A	Mass-Observation Archive
Mol	Ministry of Information
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFM	RAF Museum Archive
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
SWWEC	Second World War Experience Centre
TNA	The National Archives
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces

Introduction

In late March 1945 the Second World War in Europe was almost over. Nazi Germany was on the verge of total collapse, unable to resist the rapid advance of Soviet forces. From the autumn of 1943 Adolf Hitler had no longer been able to count on Italian support, and the Normandy landings which took place the following summer restored Allied strength in Western Europe. Back in Britain, Prime Minister Winston Churchill felt that a tipping point had been reached. The large scale area bombing of German cities, a major feature of the Allied war effort, could no longer be justified. Further, he indicated that the policy had already been taken too far. Six weeks earlier the city of Dresden in the east of Germany had been destroyed in four raids across less than 48 hours. Around 25,000 people were killed and vast areas of the city lay in ruin. This attack, Churchill wrote in a minute to the Chiefs of Staff, specifically marked the point at which Allied bombing had gone beyond what was acceptable, and taken on a wholly different character. For the remainder of the war, RAF Bomber Command was to avoid “mere acts of terror and wanton destruction”. Churchill’s assessment of the attacks was clear: “The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing.”¹

Following firm prompting from Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Charles Portal, Churchill redrafted his minute in far less dramatic terms. Yet this incident is indicative of a subject which still arouses passionate debate and controversy today. The area bombing of Germany by Bomber Command remains a contentious element of the Allied war effort, and what Churchill wrote shows an appreciation of its divisive nature. Despite the deaths in service of 55,573 members

¹ National Archives Kew (hereafter TNA). CAB 120/303. Churchill to Chiefs of Staff, 28th March 1945.

of aircrew, no official monument to those involved in the work of Bomber Command was opened until 2012.²

The debate in the post-war years has raged, periodically gaining greater attention in political, historiographical and literary contexts. Yet while a broad range of historiography has addressed the nature of the bombing campaign and the subsequent debates that have arisen in the years since the end of the war, far less attention has been paid to how it was received during the period in which it took place. This thesis will consider the wartime attitudes of British people to the bombing of German cities. Churchill's denouncement of the policy came very shortly before the end of the war. Others though took a critical approach far earlier. In late 1943, as Bomber Command made sustained attacks on Berlin, one man told the social research organisation Mass-Observation that he felt: "our present bombing of Germany is one of the greatest sins we as a nation have committed." Earlier still, as the Blitz presented nightly peril to civilians in British cities, there was a reluctance to see the same tactics applied in response. The *New Statesman and Nation* wrote: "people who have really been bombed do not want a similar misery for others."³

The Allied bombing campaign has come under sustained scrutiny in the decades since 1945. This aspect of the war in the air remains highly controversial. In public and political discourse, and the pages of a broad range of historiography, the debate remains active. The element of the campaign which has drawn most negative comment is the area bombing of German cities by Bomber Command. This was the approach taken during the latter part of the war and which was responsible for the massive destruction caused in cities across Germany. Precision

² Churchill's minute and the reaction to it has been discussed extensively. See for example Tami Davis Biddle, 'Wartime Reactions' in Paul Addison and Jeremy Crang, *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 113-116; Stephen A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 34-38; Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945. Volume III: Victory* (London: HMSO, 1961), 109-113.

³ Mass-Observation Archive (hereafter M-O A): DR 2699, reply to December 1943 Directive; *New Statesman and Nation*, 'A London Diary'. 23rd November 1940, 510-511.

bombing had proved an ineffective use of Bomber Command resources. Raids based on this method took specifically identifiable targets – railway yards, munitions factories, communication centres – as their aiming point. The Butt Report in August 1941 showed how inaccurate this method was, and following experiments with area bombing the previous winter, this new policy was officially adopted in mid-February 1942. Now whole urban areas became the target, with a heavy weight of bombs dropped into a concentrated area. Six weeks later the Cherwell paper – which advocated the direct targeting of civilian areas – confirmed the “shift in bombing priorities”. Civilians were now, officially, to come under attack. By the end of the war at estimated 353,000 German civilians had been killed.⁴ The controversy stoked since the war about the legitimacy of this method of attack has meant that retrospective accounts of the campaign – from historians and journalists and equally from those involved in the raids themselves – have been influenced by the debate itself. The wealth and depth of historiography this has created is increasingly vast and provides much for the modern reader to consider. Yet often absent from this debate are the voices of those who responded to the bombing campaign at the time. There is much to be gained from an understanding of how attitudes were shaped during the war itself.

In *Reaching for the Stars*, his history of Bomber Command during the Second World War, Mark Connelly expresses sympathy for those who offered outright support to the area bombing campaign as it was taking place, and he sets out with this position in mind. Further, he argues that certain prominent figures who disputed the legitimacy of the campaign have gained a significant place within discussion of anti-bombing sentiment, and that their views were not in

⁴ Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 288-289, 474-477. The total number of civilian deaths in Germany has been disputed and, more importantly, very difficult to state accurately. The figure of 353,000 is an estimate made by Richard Overy in 2013 based on a number of recent sources, estimates and calculations. It is a high death rate, yet markedly lower than the estimates of over 600,000 which had been circulated for many years since the end of the war.

step with the wider British public.⁵ My own thesis takes a different route, though I can agree with some of these points. Certainly individuals such as Bishop George Bell and Vera Brittain, who were opposed to the bombing campaign, have received considerably more attention in the historiography than, for example, views of members of the public. I would argue however that while Connelly is right to address reasons for support of the campaign, it is also of vital importance to consider reasons why people were either opposed to it, or held strong reservations. My thesis seeks to uncover the voices of such people. It is not the intention here to suggest that a majority in Britain were against the bombing campaign: this was not the case. Brett Holman argues that on the whole the British public were in favour reprisal bombing against German cities, yet he does not adequately acknowledge, or account for, those who did not share this view. His conclusion – that: “The Blitz myth and the reprisals debate cannot coexist; one must make way for the other” – is particularly worthy of challenge, since it ignores undermines the breadth and complexity of public opinion in Britain.⁶ There certainly was a significant minority of people who, while supporting the war effort in general terms, did not support the deliberate bombing of civilians as a means to winning it. The texture and extent of their views will be addressed in this thesis. By doing so it is possible to learn more about the levels of support for particular methods of warfare, rather than only for the war effort as a whole. By addressing the question of what British people thought of the bombing of Germany at the time it took place, it is possible to add a further level of nuance to the question of popular support for the war. The majority of the views aired and analysed within these pages belonged to people who were not pacifists. In most cases they indicate broad support for the war against the Axis Powers and firmly believed in the importance of defeating Adolf Hitler.

⁵ Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A New History of Bomber Command in World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 3-4; Mark Connelly, ‘The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939-45’ in *Contemporary British History*, 16, no. 2 (2002), 39-40.

⁶ Brett Holman, “‘Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard’: Debating Reprisals during the Blitz’ in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 58, no. 3 (2012), 407.

Yet this thesis shows that within this consensus, there existed a clear level of discomfort and dissent against the methods of warfare used to achieve these ends. In a letter to Sir Edward Keeling in November 1942, Squadron Leader J. S. Comper, son of the architect Sir Ninian Comper, articulates this position quite clearly. Qualifying what he would write by saying he was: “not a pacifist myself”, he declared that bombing cathedrals and other targets which were not directly connected to the Nazi war effort lowered the Allied campaign to the level of those whom they were fighting. Bombing such buildings, he wrote, was: “destroying some of the very aspects of that civilisation which we set out to save by this war.”⁷

The legality of the area bombing of residential areas as a policy – and of cities such as Hamburg and Dresden in particular – continues to provoke debate and disagreement. In recent historiography the question of whether accusations of war criminality can be levelled in relation to the area bombing of civilians has been raised. Jörg Friedrich’s book *The Fire*, first published in Germany in 2002, provocatively encouraged consideration of this issue.⁸ Yet even the extent to which this is a question to be answered at all has proved problematic. Frederick Taylor, the author of a volume specifically about the bombing of Dresden, rejects the notion that as a historian he should answer such questions. In an interview he said: “a war crime is a very specific thing which international lawyers argue about all the time and I would not be prepared to commit myself nor do I see why I should.”⁹ Others are far less reticent. A. C. Grayling built a case against the Allies in which he described attacks on civil populations as

⁷ Imperial War Museum Archive (hereafter IWM), Misc 10(201). Comper to Keeling, 24th November 1942.

⁸ Jörg Friedrich, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany 1940-1945* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁹ *Spiegel Online International*, ‘Dresden Bombing is to be Regretted Enormously’. 11th February 2005, accessed online. Available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel-interview-dresden-bombing-is-to-be-regretted-enormously-a-341239.html>

“moral atrocities”¹⁰ (my emphasis); Donald Bloxham explicitly calls the attack on Dresden “a war crime.”¹¹

The issue is not easy to pin down. At the Hague Conference of 1899 and 1907 attempts were made to provide a legal framework for the use of aerial bombardment, yet with the first aerial bombings from powered aircraft still predicted rather than actual, this provided fruitless.¹² The rapid growth of aerial warfare during the early part of the twentieth century allowed nations to utilise bombing as a tool for colonial control. This aspect of the history of bombing is dealt with in chapter one. It contributed to the ongoing impossibility of reaching agreement on the legal use of bombing as a form of warfare. Further moves were made to codify acceptable aerial conduct in relation to bombing. Notably, efforts were made at the Hague Conference which took place from December 1922 to February 1923 and produced the Hague Rules of Air Warfare. Article 22 stated: “Aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorising the civilian population, of destroying or damaging private property not of a military character, or of injuring non-combatants is prohibited.” The document, however, was not ratified. This lack of legal certainty over how aeroplanes could be used in wartime was compounded the lack of, in Joel Hayward’s words, “a moral consensus of any strength”.¹³ It meant that the Second World War began with no clear limits on its use. According to Tami Davis Biddle, the *Manual of Military Law* (“the reference of record prior to the war”), gave the Allies legal grounding for attacks. Bombardment, along with investment, assault, and regular siege, were “severally and jointly legitimate means of warfare.”¹⁴ Since the war part of the historiographical challenge has

¹⁰ A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Was the Allied Bombing of Civilians in WWII a Necessity or a Crime?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 279.

¹¹ Donald Bloxham, ‘Dresden as a War Crime’ in Addison and Crang, *Firestorm*, 180.

¹² Lee Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing* (New York: Scribner, 1982), 9-11. On the Hague Conventions and their precursors, see also Joel Hayward, ‘Air Power, Ethics, and Civilian Immunity during the First World War and its Aftermath’, *Global War Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010), 8-9.

¹³ Hayward, ‘Air Power’, 24-25.

¹⁴ Tami Davis Biddle, ‘Air Power’ in Michael Howard, George Andreopoulos and Mark Shulman (eds.) *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), 150;

been to establish the legality of the area bombing campaign. Within his argument Bloxham accepts that the legal picture is “not entirely clear-cut”. Yet he suggests that: “there would have been a strong *prima facie* case for [an independent war crimes tribunal] to consider the bombing [of Dresden] as a war crime.”¹⁵ In either case there would be no criminal charges for any of those who planned or took part in the Allied bomber offensive; indeed this probably saved German air staff from prosecution. Donald A. Wells writes: “aerial bombing of civilian centers was such standard practice by the air forces of all armies that no German or Japanese was ever prosecuted for the deliberate aerial attack on civilians.”¹⁶ This thesis goes back to the years in which the bombing of German cities was taking place and considers how it was viewed before the commencement of the post-war debate.

The bomber war was an expansive one. German cities across the Reich were targeted and vast damage caused. The campaign grew in scope and ferocity as the war went on. Accordingly it is not the intention here to chronologically consider the entire Allied bomber offensive. Rather, I have chosen three case studies which will be used to analyse attitudes at three distinct stages of the war. Each case study focuses on a particular attack on a German city and seeks to establish how attitudes towards the bomber campaign were framed at that point. Sonya O. Rose writes of the experience of the Second World War in Britain: “in a time now remembered in popular memory as one in which the people of the country were of one mind and were fully unified around the war effort, there was defiance, resistance and indifference.”¹⁷ This multifaceted nature of wartime experience comes under investigation here. The complexity of the

War Office. *Manual of Military Law* (London: Stationary Office, 1914). 252-253; See also Overy, *The Bombing War*, 29-32.

¹⁵ Bloxham, ‘Dresden as a War Crime’, 180-208.

¹⁶ Donald A. Wells, *War Crimes and Laws of War: Second Edition* (London: University Press of America, 1991), 39. See also Telford Taylor, *Nuremberg and Vietnam: an American Tragedy* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), 140. As Richard Overy notes, General Alexander Löhr is the exception to Wells’ suggestion that no Germans were prosecuted for bombing civilians. Löhr was executed by the Yugoslavs for the 1941 bombing of Belgrade. Overy, *The Bombing War*, 630.

¹⁷ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

sources used here present an opportunity to dig beneath what for most people was support of a just Allied war: what becomes clear is that in terms of the bombing of Germany this support did not always extend to the methods of waging the war. The bombing of civilians during the Spanish Civil War provoked outrage in Britain. It was not long before the British military would have to make decisions about how to effectively and appropriately utilise its own aerial resources in wartime.¹⁸

Before embarking on the series of case studies, chapter one charts the development of aerial bombardment during the early part of the twentieth century. The intention is to show how aerial bombardment developed rapidly in scale and usage and to consider how bombing was understood in Britain before the start of the Blitz in September 1940. Civil populations in Britain would experience aerial bombardment on a considerably larger scale than when under attack by Zeppelin and Gotha raids during the First World War. This chapter establishes the novelty of bombing as a form of weaponry. By the start of the Second World War bombing from powered aircraft remained a youthful concept. Less than thirty years separated the first experiment with the first raids of the Second World War; indeed just over thirty years had passed since the Wright brothers first achieved powered flight in 1907. Yet this short period of time encompassed a relative age in the era of aerial bombing. The meagre effects of a small number of grenades thrown from an aeroplane over Libya in 1911 were a far cry from the wholesale destruction of Guernica by German planes in 1937. The bombing of Guernica – followed as it was by a series of first-hand reports by *The Times* journalist George Steer – will be shown to have brought the prospect of bombing home to a British audience. The story of bombing in the pre-war period is multi-national, with different nations experimenting with and

¹⁸ Burleigh, M. *Moral Combat: A History of World War II* (London: HarperPress, 2010), 173-180; Overy, *The Bombing War*, 239.

developing their own aerial capabilities. The first chapter will situate Britain within this narrative and consider levels of knowledge – and fears – as the Second World War began.

Another key factor for the remainder of the thesis emerges in this chapter: the position Winston Churchill takes on aerial bombardment as the eve of the Second World War approaches. His initial scepticism about the role bombing could play in winning a war would be tested throughout the conflict and it is important to establish his position – as a key actor in British high command – at this stage.

The first case study of an attack on a German city then addresses the first RAF experiment with area bombing during the war: the December 1940 attack on Mannheim. This is addressed in chapter two. The raid was, officially, a reprisal for the attack a month previously on Coventry, and was, according to some press reports, supported wholeheartedly by civilians in Coventry. The initial raid on Coventry took place as a part of the Blitz on British cities which began on 7th September 1940 and continued for – with one exception – 76 successive nights. Even after the end of this run, attacks continued in earnest until the following summer, when German resources and attention were diverted to the planned invasion of the Soviet Union. This background of British civilians being subjected to nightly attacks in cities across the country offers vital context at this stage. Responses to the bombing of Mannheim – and more widely the question of other reprisals for attacks on British cities – are shown to be strongly influenced by the level of experience of bombing. The grim pre-war expectations of massive air raids did not come to pass in the early years of the war; indeed the bombardment experienced by British citizens did not reach the same scale as that which would increasingly be visited upon German civilians. Nevertheless as Malcolm Smith argues, this fact should not undermine the impact the Blitz had on those who lived through it. Amid the indiscriminate pattern of falling bombs, Smith writes of a public: “responding stoically to the challenge to their community, their families, their civic buildings, their sense of the past and, therefore, their

identity in the present.” To be addressed here will be how this stoicism was manifested. For Smith, the experience of the Blitz “made it that much easier to contemplate visiting the same fate on the enemy.” As the evidence of this chapter of my thesis will show, this did not always translate into an enthusiastic response.¹⁹ I will demonstrate that the assumed public support in Coventry for reprisals was not an accurate picture of the actual feeling within the city, and that this was mirrored in other cities when under bombardment. The question of reprisals was not only considered at the highest levels of British military command but also in the press and by members of the public who had direct experience of aerial attack. As this chapter will show, it was far more nuanced and subject to condition than some press accounts indicated. The correlation between physical experience of bombing and desire for reprisal attacks in different geographical areas will be considered in depth here.

The reprisal raid on Mannheim itself was limited in terms of the damage caused compared to what was intended – and what was hoped for – by those planning the attack. This is an indicator of the technological capacity of Bomber Command at the time. In turn, the response to the bombing of Mannheim specifically is also somewhat limited. The source material used in this section of the thesis relates not only to Mannheim but to bombing more widely in response to raids on British cities. This offers the opportunity to consider in detail the question of reprisals and how it was treated in different parts of the country.

Mannheim has a vital place in the story. The official documents surrounding the planning of the raid show, without question, a willingness at Whitehall and within Bomber Command to begin practising area bombing as an alternative to precision attacks. The second and third case studies consider area attacks on a wholly grander scale which saw death and damage inflicted

¹⁹ Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (London: Routledge, 2000), 70-71, 89-90.

far more extensively. The attack on Mannheim – for all its limited results – will be shown as a vital step on the road towards the considerably larger raids which took place later in the war.

The subject of the next case study – addressed in chapter three – took place two and a half years after the attack on Mannheim. In July and August 1943 the RAF, with daytime support from the United States Army Air Force (USAAF), destroyed vast areas of Hamburg in the most devastating series of attacks during the war. This huge area attack was the ultimate expression of what had been attempted in Mannheim. Around 37,000 people were killed. By this stage Bomber Command had a far greater capability and capacity to support its ambition, and was operating under an official policy of area bombing. Several people took issue with the new scale of the bomber war at this point and were particularly concerned by the attacks on Hamburg. By this stage of the war a number of people displayed knowledge that the bombing campaign against German cities was being operated on a different scale to that which had been experienced in British cities during the Blitz. The work of the campaign group the Bombing Restriction Committee will be examined here, and attention will be paid to the responses to a directive issued by Mass-Observation which sought to assess how those surveyed viewed the bombing of Germany. This chapter will consider the role of the Church within the debate, and particularly the role of William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury. It will show evidence of individuals who did not feel empowered to effectively engage in protest against the bombing of cities, and sought a leader, Temple, who might act as a figurehead. In spite of this Temple maintained his qualified support for the bomber campaign. This chapter will show how this blocked the voices of those seeking a wider audience for their protest. The bombing of Hamburg, and reaction to it, came at a critical stage of the war. Without a strong wave of effective protest about their tactics, and with the Air Ministry able to ward off mild questions about new tactics, Bomber Command continued to launch heavy raids on German cities until the very end of the war.

The final case study – the subject of chapter four – focuses on the bombing of Dresden in February 1945: one of those heavy raids and another major success for Bomber Command. This attack occupies arguably the most prominent place in memory of the bomber war. The city, previously largely undamaged, was destroyed in a series of raids just months before VE Day. Around 25,000 people – many of them refugees from other bombed out cities – were killed. Initial estimates of the death toll were far higher, and persisted for several years after the war. It was this attack which provoked Churchill to write his minute, as discussed above. Concerned about the impact this would have at the end of the war, he sought to retrospectively distance himself from the decision making process and to rein in the excesses of the campaign. The purpose of this chapter will be to move back to the immediate aftermath of the bombings and show that there followed an abrupt sense of dismay about the raids in Britain. The attacks were discussed in the House of Commons, and foreign press reports, reproduced in the *Manchester Guardian*, alerted readers to the massive destruction caused in the city. The responses given in the Mass-Observation diaries surveyed here show how even after over five years of war, hardened pragmatism had not replaced a clear sense of how war should be waged. As will be discussed in this chapter, Churchill's motivations for writing his minute cannot be definitively identified. He did not leave a clear account of this episode, and his history of the Second World War is largely quiet on the controversial nature of the bombing campaign. Yet what this chapter can certainly show is that this controversy over the bombing of Dresden, and around the area bombing campaign more widely, is not merely a post-war argument. Its roots were firmly established before the end of the war.

The primary sources used within this thesis were produced during the war itself. The establishment of disquiet around the nature of the Bomber Command campaign as the war progressed helps to justify the focus on contemporary sources in this thesis. As Sonya O. Rose

argues, such an approach can allow the historian to access understandings of events which are neither augmented nor diluted by “post-war reconstructions” of lived experiences.²⁰ I have avoided the use of memoirs and oral history accounts for a number of reasons. One issue raised by this point made by Rose is that of composure. According to Penny Summerfield: “public discourses are inevitably drawn upon in the composition of a story about the self.”²¹ In relation to the bombing war this is of particular relevance given the often fractious nature of the post-war debate. Of course, identifying where and how such influences are present is challenging. Yet the following quote seems clearly to be borne of reflection on events past, and seems influenced by passage of time. Roy MacDonald, a gunner in the Pathfinder Force, said in 2000: “I’d no conscience about what we were doing, none at all. I don’t think anybody did. It had to be done. That was the way we looked at it anyway.”²² While issues surrounding composure can be addressed and indeed studied in their own right, in this thesis, given the very limited amount of historiography which does address contemporary sources of public opinion, it is of value to limit the discussion to contemporary sources. There is another imperative for doing so. In *Bomber Boys*, Patrick Bishop offers a justification for the devastating attack on Dresden because: “the end was not in sight. No one could know when the war would finish and in the middle of February 1945 there was no indication that the Germans would not fight until the death of the last Nazi.”²³ While it may not have been possible then to predict an exact date for the end of the war, it was clear to most that it was not far away. With a focus on contemporary sources, this thesis will show that there was immediate anger and dismay in Britain at the size and scale of the raids. Not only this, but such

²⁰ Rose, *Which People’s War*, 25-26.

²¹ Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: creating narratives of the gendered self in oral history interviews’ in *Cultural and Social History*, 1, no. 1 (2004), 69. See also Anne Karpf, *The War After: Living With the Holocaust* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1996), 18. Karpf discusses recording her parents’ Holocaust testimonies in the 1980s: “they’ve been edited and reshaped by a later self, one with a different perspective and its own preoccupations.”

²² Quoted in Patrick Bishop, *Bomber Boys: Fighting Back 1940-1945* (London: HarperPress, 2007), 133.

²³ Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, 346-347.

a reaction came against attacks far earlier in the war, when Bishop's justification would have carried more weight. Arguing that most people in Britain felt that the Germans, as architects of the war, were "reaping the whirlwind", Connelly writes: "Only after the war when other factors came into play would the image of Bomber Command and Harris be altered." One of the main functions of this thesis will be to show that the criticisms of the bombing campaign are rooted in the midst of the campaign itself.²⁴ A. C. Grayling notes the following on the opening page of his book *Among the Dead Cities*, first published in 2006: "It is a controversy which has grown during the decades since the war ended, as the benefit of hindsight has prompted fresh examination of the area bombing strategy".²⁵ Hindsight, as Grayling identifies, has been a primary motivator of much post-war discourse on the legality and morality of the area bombing of residential areas. Yet by focusing on contemporary sources it is possible to exclude retrospective judgements and consider how the campaign was assessed as it began and grew through the war. It is important to understand the existence and nature of discomfort about attacks on civilians as those attacks took place.

There is another more straightforward reason for addressing contemporary sources and seeking an understanding of the initial response: it is a relatively under-researched topic. Churchill's minute – quoted above – has been a chronological starting point in some discussions of the issue. This thesis will show that this minute was far from the beginning of the story. In Richard Overy's impressive, comprehensive survey *The Bombing War*, attitudes of British people at the time are touched upon but not investigated in depth. Some studies of Britain during the war address attitudes to the bombing of Germany but given the wider subject matter, do not have the scope to sustain this scrutiny.²⁶ As such there is a wealth of

²⁴ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, 162-163.

²⁵ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 1.

²⁶ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 180-182, 395-396. See also, for example, Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992); Juliet Gardiner, *The Blitz: The British Under Attack* (London: HarperPress, 2010).

historiography from which developments can be made. It is hoped that this thesis can contribute to a clearer understanding of this aspect of public opinion during the Second World War.

German cities across the Reich were heavily bombed during the war, and it is worth noting here why certain other cities have *not* been taken as a focal point for the thesis. Berlin is perhaps the most obvious omission. The capital city was bombed throughout the war, and a concerted effort was made during the winter of 1943-1944 to strike a decisive blow. Yet while considerable effort and resources were diverted to this end, the campaign against Berlin never reached a successful outcome for the Allies. Robin Neillands writes: “The Battle of Berlin was a defeat for the RAF.”²⁷ Given that this most sustained series of attacks on Berlin took place at a similar stage of the war to Hamburg, and given the wildly different outcomes of the attacks, Hamburg is the more appropriate subject for consideration here. The attacks on Hamburg were concentrated into a period of little more than a week; by contrast the most sustained period of bombing Berlin was drawn out over a number of months. For these reasons the bombing of Berlin would make for a less coherent case study within this thesis. As a target for bombing Berlin had symbolic importance. Yet the specific existence of dissent against the bombings of Hamburg and Dresden shows an engagement with the policy of bombing away from the capital city.

Lübeck and Rostock were subjected to major raids in the months following the official switch to an area bombing policy in February 1942, while shortly afterwards Cologne and Essen were the targets of the first ‘Thousand Bomber Raids’. Few built-up areas were spared, particularly as the Allies gained ever greater superiority in the skies above Europe. Yet Hamburg and Dresden are certainly the most appropriate subjects for sustained discussion here. Hamburg

²⁷ Robin Neillands, *The Bomber War: Arthur Harris and the Allied Bomber Offensive 1939-1945* (London: John Murray, 2004), 292. See also Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945. Volume II: Endeavour* (London: HMSO, 1961), 190-211.

received the most devastating series of attacks by Bomber Command and came as the tide of the war began to turn irretrievably against Nazi Germany. The scale of the attack at Dresden was also huge, and the proximity to the end of the war, coupled with the position it holds within memory of the area bombing campaign, makes it a vital point of interest.²⁸

Each case study includes discussion of the operational aspects of the attacks in question. Official documentation produced in the build-up to the attacks, as well as reports in the aftermath, show how the raids took place and consider their effectiveness and the extent of the damage caused and human life lost. Discussion of documents related to the planning of the attack on Mannheim are given particular attention due to the change in approach it represented. A range of documents are then used to provide a broad representation of attitudes at each stage of the war. This initial discussion of operational aspects of the raids gives an opportunity to consider how figures involved in the decision making process viewed the nature of the attacks. As the pitch of the bombing campaign heightened, a greater challenge was issued to those in its command. At a more functional level the views of aircrew carrying out the attacks have also been sought. These are often hard to come by as many diaries and log-books contain only the minimal details of particular attacks: location, date, and weight of bombs dropped. Where sufficient source material is available I have included more detailed comment about the recorded experience of taking part in the campaign. Yet as Martin Francis notes wartime reflections among crew members on the nature of the campaign were limited. What is often evident in diaries is the entirely understandable focus on mere survival: the high casualty rate of those crews was a direct product of the treacherous nature of active service. "During the war itself bomber aircrews had little opportunity, or desire, to visit the

²⁸ See, for example, Martin Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg: The Firestorm Raid* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 142-174; Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday 13 February 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 326-362.

issue of air-power ethics. The demands of operational life discouraged excessive reflection.”²⁹

Where members of aircrew did record reflections, they can offer an important insight into how the changing form of Allied bombing was received by those physically carrying it out.

In each chapter newspaper reports and editorials feature prominently to show how the bombing of German cities was addressed in the press. In 1939 the founders of the Mass-Observation project – Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson – published findings from the research carried out in the organisation’s early years. They found that newspapers continued to play a substantial role in informing the views of the British public, a view later echoed by James Curran and Jean Seaton.³⁰ Two thirds of adults “regularly saw” a daily newspaper,³¹ and although radio overtook print media during the war years, the suspension of the BBC’s independent constitution during this period ensured that newspapers could offer a wider range of information for their readers to digest.³² The censorial controls in Great Britain during the war evidently had an impact on the *nature* of material which could be printed, and this issue is dealt with further in the chapter on Mannheim. Yet the differing tones of different newspapers’ output offered scope for members of the public to consider the bombing of German cities. Local press reports in Britain during the Blitz challenged the myth that angry calls for reprisals spread through cities after a raid. Details of conditions in Dresden after its own destruction had an immediate bearing on British opinion and a lasting effect on the legitimacy of bombing the city.

²⁹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 172. See also Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, 130.

³⁰ Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Britain by Mass Observation* (London: Penguin, 1939), 30; James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 2003), 141.

³¹ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 3.

³² Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, 141, and Andrew Knapp, ‘The Allied Bombing Offensive in the British Media, 1942-45’ in Andrew Knapp and Hilary Footitt (eds.), *Liberal Democracies at War: Conflict and Representation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 41-42.

This thesis uses for discussion a range of publications diverse in their political stance and readership. In 1939 five daily newspapers – the *Daily Express*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *News Chronicle* – all had circulations of over one million. The *Daily Express*, at over 2.5 million, had the highest sales figures.³³ Together, as Adrian Bingham writes, they “dominated the market”.³⁴ These newspapers also catered for readers across the political spectrum. The *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*, read predominantly by middle-class readers, pursued a Conservative editorial approach, while the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Herald*, with their Labour sympathies, had a more working-class readership. The *Daily Herald*, under Walter Layton, espoused a Liberal agenda.³⁵ While these most popular newspapers could, clearly, reach the largest audience, other publications with a far smaller print-run were able to exert an influence due to the readership they did cater for. Compared to the sales figures of those newspapers discussed above, the *Times* sold a relatively meagre 204,000.³⁶ Yet its influence certainly outweighed this statistic and, according to Lance Price, the newspaper was viewed abroad as “the voice of the British nation”, even when this was not always the case *in* Britain.³⁷ The *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* sits somewhere between these examples. With a circulation of 737,000 on the eve of the war, it sold more widely than the *Times* without quite the reach of the most popular dailies.³⁸ The Liberal-supporting *Manchester Guardian*, meanwhile, is included here as it had a greater focus on foreign affairs than other regional newspapers and played a particularly visible role in reporting the aftermath of the Dresden

³³ Tom Jeffrey and Keith McClelland, ‘A world fit to live in: the Daily Mail and the middle classes 1918-39’ in James Curran, Anthony Smith Pauline Wingate, *Impact and Influences: Essays on media power in the twentieth century* (London: Methuen, 1987), 29.

³⁴ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press*, 12-13.

³⁵ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press*, 12-13.

³⁶ Jeffrey and McClelland, ‘A world fit to live in’, 29.

³⁷ Lance Price, *Where the Power Lies: Prime Ministers v The Media* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 102.

³⁸ Jeffrey and McClelland, ‘A world fit to live in’, 29.

attacks.³⁹ Another left-wing publication, the *New Statesman and Nation*, has been included here because, despite its low circulation, Price writes that its editors were prepared to ask bigger questions than the popular press.⁴⁰ This is especially evident during the Blitz, where, as the chapter on Mannheim will show, the publication regularly presented which challenged calls for reprisals. The growing scarcity of newsprint ensured that newspapers – as individual products – thinned through the war years. Yet they remained in high demand and helped inform public opinion.⁴¹

With regards to political stance and editorial policy, the wartime careers of Walter Layton, editorial director of the *News Chronicle*, and Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the *Daily Mail*, can help to illustrate how external pressures could affect the editorial line in newspapers. The *News Chronicle* had campaigned against the bombing of civilians during the Spanish Civil War, and as the chapter on the bombing of Hamburg will show, did little to gloss over the impact bombing had on civilians as the weight of Allied bombs grew into the summer of 1943. Yet when Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940 – prior to the start of the Blitz – Layton was appointed Director-General of Programmes at the Ministry of Supply. Although he retained some authority over the editorial line of the newspaper during his time in the government, he came to an understanding with Churchill that he would not put across his political views in the newspaper. Following a period of ill-health Layton confirmed in February 1943 that he would stand down from his position in government. According to David Hubback, Layton “wanted to be able to express his political opinion publically”, a state of affairs which

³⁹ A. P. Wadsworth (ed.), *C. P. Scott 1846-1932: The Making of the Manchester Guardian* (Manchester: Frederick Muller, 1946), 230-231; *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Dresden wiped out’. 5th March 1945, 6.

⁴⁰ Price, *Where the Power Lies*, 80.

⁴¹ Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of The Political Press in Britain (Volume Two: The Twentieth Century)* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), 602-603. On the influence of press reports on public opinion see also Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain’s Fear of the Bomber, 1908-1941* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 174-177.

would have contravened his agreement with the Prime Minister.⁴² The proprietor of the *Daily Express* meanwhile, Lord Beaverbrook, took up office as Minister of Aircraft Production, also in May 1940. Beaverbrook was an enthusiastic cheerleader for the bombing campaign and the chapter on Mannheim will help confirm the claim made by Tom Harrison: that Beaverbrook “vigorously reported and elaborated on public demand, nay clamour, for ‘reprisals’ through his news chain.”⁴³ Stephen Koss writes that during the 1930s editors of a number of newspapers gained an increasingly powerful position against the control of proprietors. The *Times*, the *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* all stand as examples of this phenomenon; the *Daily Express* remained under Beaverbrook’s far tighter control. Laurence Cadbury, the owner of the of the *News Chronicle*, was present for weekly editorial conferences but placed his trust in Layton to ensure policy was appropriate.⁴⁴ The differing political views and the levels of influence respectively enjoyed by Layton and Beaverbrook are illustrative both of the ways in which editorial freedom could be compromised, and the extent to which Layton was able to reclaim it.

By surveying a wide selection of newspapers, with an awareness of their reach, aims and restrictions, it has been possible to build up a comprehensive picture of the range of print-media available to the British public to help inform them about the progress of the war.

A number of sources have been used through the thesis in order to build a picture of the opinions of the British public. Chief among them are the Mass-Observation Archive and data collected by the British Institute for Public Opinion. During the Second World War volunteers for Mass-Observation kept regular diaries recording their daily life and their thoughts on the progress of the war. Some of the panel also gave written responses to set ‘directives’, and field

⁴² David Hubback, *No Ordinary Press Baron: A Life of Walter Layton* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 153-197.

⁴³ Tom Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (London: Collins, 1976), 316.

⁴⁴ Koss, *The Rise and Fall*, 555, 573.

research was carried out by the organisation. Although the cross-section of those surveyed – particularly the diarists – was not representative of the entire British population, there are two major advantages in using the resource for this project. First, they provide the contemporary perspectives of the events that are collected in this paper. As such, they provide an insight into daily reflections on a diverse range of subjects. As Robert Mackay writes: “Mass-Observation’s wartime files constitute a rich vein of raw material on how people felt and acted at this time.”⁴⁵ Sandra Koa Wing adds: “By 1939 Mass-Observation was well placed to preserve the fabric of individual responses to the war [including] personal comments about how the war was being waged and how it was reported in the press.”⁴⁶ In a thesis which actively seeks voices and accounts which have rarely, if ever, been heard, Mass-Observation is a hugely valuable resource. Keeping a diary or responding to directives gave people an opportunity to record their views. The directive responses in chapter three are evidence of a channel for those who felt that they otherwise lacked a suitable forum for their views about the bombing of Germany.⁴⁷ Lucy Noakes explains the great utility of Mass-Observation to go beyond more quantitative approaches to garnering public opinion. Those who kept diaries for the organisation, or who responded to specific directives: “are able to write at length on various issues, and thus show the complexities of belief that can underlie simple yes/no responses to more quantitative studies of public opinion.” Further, Noakes considers possible motivations for those writing; in the following case with specific reference to the directive responses on the subject of bombing. One respondent gave particularly qualified support for the bombing campaign. By giving such a response to Mass-Observation: “he was able to express his views

⁴⁵ Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 11.

⁴⁶ Sandra Koa Wing, *Mass Observation: Britain in the Second World War* (London: The Folio Society, 2007), xii.

⁴⁷ Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street and David Bloome, *Writing Ourselves: Mass-Observation and Literary Practices* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2000), 282-283.

and reservations to a wider audience".⁴⁸ Mass-Observation then could serve, at the time, as a receptive ear for those who wanted to find an outlet for their thoughts on the progress of the war; it can serve now as a window to the highly textured canvas of public opinion. They are an incredibly rich series of sources which demonstrate in great depth *why* some people held particular views; not simply *that* they held them. As Summerfield writes, the depth of the material produced for Mass-Observation allowed the production of a "fuller picture" of public opinion than more statistically driven research.⁴⁹ Alongside these positive appraisals of Mass-Observation it must, of course, be noted that the archive does not offer a perfect reflection of wider attitudes. James Hinton for example considers demographic representation within the panel and the inevitable biases created: some of these particular issues are discussed further in chapter three. With an awareness of the limits of what conclusions can be drawn, Mass-Observation can provide qualitative material evidence of attitudes to the bombing offensive.⁵⁰ In order to gain a greater sense of the number of those holding particular views, BIPO surveys, where available, have also been addressed. Formed in 1937 the organisation sought to gain the views of a representative cross-section of the British public. This was hard to achieve in practice. Even Henry Durant, who founded the BIPO, "lacked confidence in the reliability of detailed breakdowns of the results": for example the views within divisions of gender, age, and social class.⁵¹ There are certainly valid reservations about the use of BIPO surveys. Yet their function within this thesis is to help to give some indication of the levels of broader public support for the bombing campaign at different stages of the war. It is Mass-Observation

⁴⁸ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998), 79

⁴⁹ Penny Summerfield, 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, no. 3, (1985), 449.

⁵⁰ James Hinton, *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 268-272. See also Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 9-10.

⁵¹ Mark Roodhouse, 'Fish-and-Chip Intelligence': Henry Durant and the British Institute of Public Opinion, 1936-63', *Twentieth Century British History*, 24, no. 2 (2013), 224-248.

though which contributes the most valuable evidence here, and helps to create a layered picture of some of the reasoned responses to the bombing of Germany.⁵²

The combined use of these varied sources through three case studies will help create a sense of how the area bombing of German cities was received in Britain. What emerges is a sense of a nation which was not unified in its desire for unrestrained warfare against Germany. Assumptions about near-universal support for an ever greater weight of bombs to be dropped on cities – an assumption which Churchill expressed publically in 1941 – were not accurate. The area bombing campaign still elicits powerful debate on military tactics and the position of civilians in times of conflict. The condemnation which the policy has received in a number of quarters has been met by staunch defence: both in terms of the role aerial bombardment played in the Allied victory and the incredible bravery of those who participated in it. By examining responses to the raids as they were still taking place, we stand to learn far more about the relationship between states waging war, and the citizens in whose name it is carried out.

⁵² Rose, *Which People's War*, 27.

Chapter 1 – Aerial bombing before the Second World War

Harding: What's all this fuss about in the papers tonight, Mr Cabal?

Cabal: Wars, and rumours about wars.

Harding: Crying wolf?

Cabal: Someday a wolf will come. These fools are capable of anything.⁵³

The above exchange takes place at the start of Alexander Korda and William Cameron Menzies' *Things to Come*, released in 1936. One of the most popular films of the year with critics and the public alike, it took £350,000 in cinemas.⁵⁴ The film forecasts a world at war and depicts a city under aerial attack. It is based on H.G. Wells' 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come*. 'Everytown' (a barely disguised London, with a version of St. Paul's Cathedral prominent) is hit by a destructive bombing raid on the same night as Harding and Cabal discuss the impending war. The city is thrown into chaos: the anti-aircraft guns unable to prevent the onslaught. A cinema and a department store are destroyed and fires are shown burning in hollowed out buildings. The lifeless body of a young boy is seen in the rubble. Soldiers, tanks and warships are mobilised. Waves of countless aeroplanes appear over the coast, continue overland and appear in the sky above a town.⁵⁵

Things to Come was shown again in cinemas in the spring of 1940. World war had moved from feared future to reality, though the effects of it had yet to be extended to the British home front. The scenes of aeroplanes crossing the coast aroused laughter in audiences, "but the

⁵³ *Things to Come* (dir. William Cameron Menzies, 1936).

⁵⁴ R. Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 172-173, and John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 272. As James Chapman has written, reliable data for measuring film popularity in this period is hard to come by. Sedgwick's data can give "invaluable" data in this regard. See James Chapman, *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 12, 328.

⁵⁵ *Things to Come* (Menzies). See also H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London: Hutchinson, 1933). The opening scenes of *Things to Come* depict anxieties over a coming age of aerial warfare and a destructive raid on a British city. This should not be read as an appraisal of the ultimate message of the film; David Edgerton notes this would be a "very partial" reading of the film *as a whole*, in which technology is ultimately used to overcome dark forces. David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 44-45.

actual shots of air raid panic, of gas-masks being issued, of people running for shelter, and so on, were received in silence and with interest.”⁵⁶ Susan Grayzel suggests that the film’s release in 1936 tapped into the particular climate of fear and apprehension which was taking hold.⁵⁷ The experience of air raids would soon become a reality for civil populations across Europe. The purpose of this chapter is to address three key issues which are an important background to the Allied Bomber Offensive that reduced German cities to rubble during the Second World War. A clear appreciation of these issues allows us to come to a deeper understanding of what was at stake as Bomber Command attacked the Reich with increasing vigour. British people in their thirties and older had lived through the birth and subsequent growth of aerial bombardment.

The first subject that this chapter will address is the very novelty of aerial bombardment, and indeed powered flight itself, on the eve of the Second World War. The rapid development of bombing as a viable form of warfare is striking: just twenty-six years separated the very first incident of bombs being dropped from an aeroplane in 1911, and the deliberate destruction of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War by a fleet of aircraft in 1937 (which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter) as the prospect of a second global conflict grew ever more real. As British people came under sustained bombing attack by the Luftwaffe in 1940 and 1941, and began to cast their minds east to fellow civilians with a shared experience in Germany, they had also to come to terms with a form of warfare which had, until relatively recently, been the territory only of science fiction writers. It is vital that we approach the wartime debate on aerial bombardment with a keen understanding of its youthfulness. To further emphasise this point, public understanding of the realities of bombing was limited by

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 182.

⁵⁷ Susan R. Grayzel, “A promise of terror to come’: Air Power and the Destruction of Cities in British Imagination and Experience, 1908-39’ in Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 57-60.

the lack of documentary evidence of its effects and the fact that most attacks took place far from Britain. The impact of the attack on Guernica for British observers was that first-hand reports were published in British newspapers; bombing as a weapon that could be used to kill European citizens was now clearly displayed in the press. Much of this chapter will be devoted to the British press response to the bombing of Guernica, for it will inform the later discussion of the bombing of Germany.

The second key function of this chapter will be to situate Britain squarely within the pre-war bombing narrative. With the recent advent of bombing – and, after the end of the First World War, the newly enlarged British Empire – there arose a pressing need to seek a cheap and effective method of exercising colonial control. The growing claim of the Royal Air Force to be involved in this process will be examined in this chapter, as will the expanding duties it took on away from the European sphere. The use of aerial bombardment as a method of colonial policing ensured that Bomber Command had developed useful experience by the eve of the Second World War.

The final point will be, as has already been touched upon, to show how the bombing of Guernica was presented to a British audience. Though the attack on the small Basque town took place twenty-six years after the first bombs were dropped on Libya, this was the first aerial attack which drew major press attention in Britain. The presence of British fighters in Spain, along with a body of international reporters, ensured that the Spanish Civil War featured prominently in the pages of British newspapers. The bombing of Guernica was, as will be outlined here, covered by the first-hand reports of George Steer in *the Times*. Understanding the outrage that this attack provoked is a vital precursor to the bombing campaign of the Second World War.

Innovation

The first century of aerial bombardment began and ended in Libya. Over the course of one hundred years, starting in 1911, aircraft have been used to bomb targets on land across the world. During this period bombing from the skies developed from a pilot manually throwing grenades out of his cockpit onto military garrisons below, to precision bombing from high speed, often unmanned aircraft. With modern air forces now engaged in conflict in different arenas around the world, targets can be bombed by “pilots” sitting in control rooms thousands of miles from the action. Thus have civilians been killed in an environment which, to the aggressor, is largely risk-free. It is a far cry from the first aerial bombing, carried out by a lone pilot in a plane with an open cockpit.⁵⁸

Aeroplane flight was still a very new technology in the early twentieth century, but building on the foundations created from other “technologies of speed” – railways and cars – it “conquered distances and reinvented geography” for converts.⁵⁹ With the constantly increased capability of aircraft through the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, methods of attack from the sky have changed dramatically across this century of bombing. The main focus of this thesis will be the relatively short period of the Second World War. Before aiming the spotlight at this period it is useful first to understand the background to it. By charting the rapid development of this new method of warfare and the way in which it came to be understood we can gain a far clearer perspective on the issues surrounding reception of the Second World War campaigns.

⁵⁸ *The Guardian*, ‘Afghan civilians killed by RAF drone’. 5th July 2011, 1; *The Guardian*, ‘RAF tackles Taliban in Afghanistan – using joysticks in Las Vegas’. 5th July 2011, 10; *BBC*, ‘Libya: US confirms first Predator strike’. 23rd April 2011 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13176645>; accessed 5th July 2011).

⁵⁹ Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13.

Aerial bombing, given its broadest definition, began ninety years before the outbreak of WWII with the use of unmanned balloons. As will be discussed this practice was banned temporarily in 1899. The failure to agree on an extension to the ban paved the way for the use of aeroplanes for bombing in the early part of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ The first part of this opening chapter will serve as a history of aerial bombardment using powered aircraft. This period begins with the first use of bombs thrown on Libya in 1911 and closes with the aerial attacks on Spanish towns during the Spanish Civil War, of which Guernica stands as a symbol.

Aerial bombardment in this period can be considered in three different contexts: wartime bombing; imperial policing; and the less frequent instances of a state bombing its own civilians. As is to be expected these definitions – specifically the first two – are fluid. Drawing a clear dividing line between warfare and policing is not easy, in part where there was a colonial setting of both. This overlap means that it makes sense to address instances of aerial bombing chronologically rather than thematically. Most weight will be given to the Spanish Civil War due to the great interest it attracted in Britain. Interspersed with this attempt to outline the facts of different attacks and the theory behind them will be discussion of the development of socio-political understanding of bombing through the period. In keeping with the main focus of this thesis most of the contemporary analysis will be from British commentators.

Futurism

In the early days of air power the Italian Giulio Douhet was one of the first people to recognise the “tremendous potential” of bomber planes. His writings were hugely influential in the doctrinal development of aerial bombing. I will return in more detail to Douhet later; here it is

⁶⁰ Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing*, 9-11.

useful to briefly consider his own influences.⁶¹ On 20th February 1909, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* published on its front page 'The Futurist Manifesto' written by the Italian Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, resident in Paris at the time. Itself built on the Nietzschean principle of self-enhancement over mere existence, the argument was clear. Marinetti was adamant that Italy had to discard the "gangrene" that was its traditions ("We want to demolish museums and libraries") and instead embrace modern technology if it were to achieve great power status. He made direct reference to the importance of aeroplanes in his vision, and links them to the image of a proud nation: "We will sing of... the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds."⁶²

Notwithstanding the short-lived Vorticist art movement and the related literary magazine *BLAST*, Futurism did not properly take off in Britain. Marinetti had mixed feelings about the English: while he admired their patriotism he was critical of their "lamentable love of tradition" which evidently did not sit within the parameters of Futurism.⁶³ These cultural differences are well illustrated by the remarkable story told by the journalist Francis McCullagh who condemned Italian conduct in Libya. Piqued by the criticism Marinetti, along with the Futurist painter Umberto Boccioni and another, unnamed, "gentleman", came to McCullagh's house, armed and prepared to fight him. Though the incident eventually passed, if not without argument then at least without violence, McCullagh's reflection on the incident demonstrates both "this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence" and the English tradition Marinetti so disliked. "Is it not rather impudent of foreigners enjoying the hospitality of this country to thus

⁶¹ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 573.

⁶² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Futurist Manifesto'. On Futurism and its significance, see, for example, James Joll, *Three Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 133-139; Gunter Berghaus, *The Genesis of Futurism: Marinetti's Early Career and Writings, 1899-1909* (Leeds: The Society for Italian Studies, 1995), 12-17.

⁶³ Joll, *Three Intellectuals*, 151-154

burst, armed, and presume into the houses of men who criticise the conduct of their troops in Tripoli?"⁶⁴

The First World War "meant the end of Futurism as a coherent movement"⁶⁵ but it retains huge importance in this story due to its influence on the early proponents of aerial bombardment. The closing line of the manifesto is a bombastic summation of the mission of Futurism; it can also be read a challenge to those who would in the coming years embrace air power. "Standing on the world's summit we launch once again our insolent challenge to the stars!"⁶⁶

Early experiments

Aerial bombing was not new in 1911. The Habsburgs had dropped bombs from unmanned balloons – capable of carrying a single bomb – on Venice in 1849. A five year ban was placed on dropping projectiles or explosives from aircraft at the Hague Convention of 1899. With the first successful aeroplane flight still four years away the presumed targets of the ban were balloons, which made an inaccurate and ineffective vessel for bombardment (Kennett describes them as a mere "plaything of the winds")⁶⁷. The reason for limiting the ban to five years was that if aircraft could be developed with greater control over direction and speed, they could make a far greater contribution to a war effort and indeed shorten the length of conflicts. By the time of the second Hague Convention in 1907 the ban had expired and attempts were made to restore it. Those countries at the forefront of aviation research – Germany, France and Italy – did not consent to the ban. Military utility and the failure to agree

⁶⁴ Francis McCullagh, *Italy's War for a Desert* (London: Herbert and Daniel, 1912), xxii-xxiv.

⁶⁵ Joll, *Three Intellectuals*, 168.

⁶⁶ Marinetti, 'The Futurist Manifesto'.

⁶⁷ Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing*, 10.

on how regulation would work paved the way for the early experiments in the 1910s and later for the use of bomber planes during the First World War.⁶⁸

It is difficult to overstate quite how novel the concept of piloting powered aircraft was by the time the first bombs were dropped from a plane in 1911. The Wright brothers completed the first successful flights on 17th December 1903, the first of which covered 37 metres at less than 7mph. By the beginning of 1908 there were just four airmen worldwide. Three years later, in March 1911, this number had swelled to around 700. Yet the very fact that they could be counted and listed by name (even in a list which does not purport to be fully complete) reveals the enduring novelty of piloting. Graham-White and Harper published the list in an edited collection *The Aeroplane: Past, Present and Future*. The more notable airmen and airwomen on the list were afforded a paragraph or two about their achievements; Louis Bleriot for example, was given greater attention having flown across the English Channel in 1909. The majority were listed by surname alongside the model of plane they flew. Scanning the list, one particular entry appears individually insignificant amongst the raft of airmen less distinguished than Bleriot. "GAVOTTI, Lieut – Flies a Voisin biplane" reads this entry in full. Worthy of only four words to accompany his name at the start of 1911; by the end of the year this pilot would have set in motion the age of aerial bombardment from powered aircraft.⁶⁹ This development was itself anticipated later in the same book in a chapter by C. G. Grunhold.⁷⁰ In his chapter Louis Paulhan considered what future developments might be seen in aviation. He highlighted the dangers in "set[ting] up as a prophet" where the development of flight technology was concerned: an unnamed person had been prepared to bet £1,000,000 that no-one would ever fly to Manchester from London by plane! Paulhan himself won the rather more modest prize

⁶⁸ Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing*, 5-10; Claude Graham-White and Harry Harper (eds.), *The Aeroplane: Past, Present and Future* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1911), 283.

⁶⁹ Claude Graham-White and Harry Harper, 'The World's Airmen' in Graham-White and Harper, *The Aeroplane*, 16.

⁷⁰ C. G. Grunhold, 'The Pioneers of Flight' in Graham-White and Harper, *The Aeroplane*, 45-72.

of £10,000 offered by the *Daily Mail* when he achieved the feat in 1910. Perhaps it was this success at pushing boundaries which helped persuade Paulhan to risk a prediction: “I see no reason at all to doubt but that the use of aeroplanes for military purposes on land, and for naval work at sea, will be the next definite and practical advance which will be made.”⁷¹ Later in the book Colonel John Capper considered specifically the use of planes in warfare. He outlined what the possible uses for aeroplanes were and explicitly notes the dropping of grenades from a cockpit (he did not, even by implication, suggest that aeroplanes would be used to bomb cities) while also arguing that the “moral effect cannot...be eliminated.” He thought that damage would inevitably be limited due to the inaccuracy which would be associated with throwing a grenade overboard, but he suggested that repeated evening attacks would be “excessively annoying.” Capper noted early in his chapter that planes had not, at the time of writing, been used in warfare. It was not long however before his forecasts were put to the test.⁷²

Much of the early history of aerial bombing can be told from a colonial viewpoint and this first foray very much fits that trend. The desire of states to acquire or maintain an empire nourished a new form of weaponry. Expansionist ambitions led to the invasion of Libya by Italian troops in 1911. After reconnaissance flights in late October, what had begun as a land campaign was definitively altered on 1st November when Giulio Gavotti – now flying a Taube monoplane – threw four grenades from the open cockpit down onto an Ottoman military base in Taguira. The significance of the attacks was far greater than the rather scant damage caused. Less than eight years since the Wright brothers had made their first flight, the era of aerial bombing was underway. Gavotti himself was evidently aware of the significance of his actions. In a letter to his father he wrote: “It is the first time that we will try this and if I

⁷¹ Louis Paulhan, ‘The Future of Flying’ in Graham-White and Harper, *The Aeroplane*, 294-296.

⁷² J. E. Capper, ‘The Aeroplane in Warfare’ in Graham-White and Harper, *The Aeroplane*, 166-196.

succeed, I will be really pleased to be the first person to do it.”⁷³ Kennett speculates that the bombing “could hardly have been much more than a gesture” given the imprecision of the method and the very limited number of bombs a pilot could carry.⁷⁴ Nonetheless it was a momentous first act. Whereas previously European powers had advanced over land, here was a weapon which subverted traditional military tactics and could be used to demonstrate superiority and supremacy. This principle was quickly adopted as a method of controlling existing colonial interests. In 1912 France dealt with rebellion in its colony French Morocco by recourse to the bomber. The effect of this attack highlights a theme which would run through multinational colonial bombing campaigns over the next two decades. Kennett writes that ‘bombing unruly natives: “gave a clear indication of the harsh character of this type of warfare, the purpose of which was to teach severe lessons”’.⁷⁵ According to the theories of a number of early airpower pioneers, to groups who had only previously experienced assaults from on land, from which to a greater or lesser extent they could defend themselves, bombing would be a terrifying new proposition which would hasten submission or collapse. Pursuit of this principle can be seen time and again, particular in British experiments with colonial bombing in the Middle East and India after the First World War. Yet at this early stage, a challenge was presented to those nations with access to this technology. How to turn a gesture into a militarily significant action would become increasingly important.⁷⁶

Against this background of aerial bombing becoming a reality, science fiction writers of the era had a new subject for their work. In 1908 H. G. Wells predicted in his book *The War in the Air* that civilians would soon experience aerial bombardment. Only four years passed before those

⁷³ *BBC News*, ‘Libya 1911: How an Italian pilot began the air war era’. 10th May 2011. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13294524>; accessed 5th July 2011).

⁷⁴ Kennett, *A History*, 13.

⁷⁵ Kennett, *A History*, 15.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 79, *The Guardian*, ‘Libya Remembers, We Forget: These Bombs Are Not The First’. 25th March 2011, 36, and Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

first bombs fell on Libya. His attention soon turned to the prospect of nuclear warfare in *The World Set Free*, and though he would have to wait longer for this nightmare vision to be realised, by the end of the Second World War he had again been proved correct.⁷⁷ Military reality was certainly close to keeping pace with science fiction in the rapid development of aerial bombardment.⁷⁸

The early years of aerial bombing were not greatly successful. Italian and French attempts to harness the new techniques, while promising, did not yield startling material results. Nonetheless military strategists had seen enough to be convinced of the need to massively increase their aerial capacities by 1914.

First World War

The First World War was popularly expected to be short. The vast majority of those men who would physically contest the war had grown up during the period of relative peace in Europe from 1871 to 1914 and at least in the early days believed in the popular refrain that they would be “home by Christmas.” As A. J. P. Taylor writes: “All imagined that it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided.”⁷⁹ Ivan Bloch was one of the few to predict, a decade and a half before 1914, that “a war between the great powers would be a long and bloody stalemate.”⁸⁰ In the event close to 10,000,000 soldiers were killed in a conflict which prompted George Duhamel to write, with specific reference to the Somme: “war has become an industry, a mechanical and methodical enterprise for killing.”⁸¹ Although persistent,

⁷⁷ H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (London: George Bell, 1908) and H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

⁷⁸ I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁷⁹ A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 166.

⁸⁰ In *La Guerre Future* (1898). See Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 366.

⁸¹ Georges Duhamel, *Civilization* (New York: The Century Co., 1919), 35.

the idea of war as a “gallant” act fought by “the brave” and underpinned by “comradeship” was undermined by the bloody realities of 1914-1918.⁸²

To reiterate an earlier point, powered aeroplanes remained very much in their infancy in the early part of the twentieth century. Less than twelve years passed between the first flight and the outbreak of the First World War. The youth of powered aircraft ensured that they shared the skies with more primitive flyers: the Serb army used 192 homing pigeons for communications during the war.⁸³ Britain entered the war in 1914 with two separate air forces, both subordinate to the traditional sections of the military. The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) was initially responsible for providing aerial support to the army in the form of reconnaissance work, while the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS) served a support function in naval matters. Given the immediate use of bombs by Germany – less than a fortnight into the war Liège was attacked by Zeppelins – there was an abrupt need for a firm response. The RFC’s bombing campaign began in 1915, but before this the RNAS took the essentially defensive step of bombing Zeppelin sheds in Cologne and Düsseldorf in the autumn of 1914. At the start of 1915 citizens of Great Yarmouth became the first ever civilians to be targeted by aerial bombardment (Liège had been the scene of fighting on the ground and was therefore legitimately part of the battlefield).⁸⁴ By the end of the war bombing had developed to the point whereby it could play an important part in warfare. The different attitudes of those countries which experienced bombing during the First World War reveals the lack of international consensus over how it should be regarded within the course of war. The difference between Britain and France is worthy of brief discussion here. In France Kennett argues that captured foreign pilots would have been treated like any other prisoner of war:

⁸² See, for example, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 22-23; Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 371; Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 50.

⁸³ Jeremy Black, *War: Past, Present & Future* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 209.

⁸⁴ Kennett, *A History*, 20-22.

that they had bombed the country would not be considered meritorious of harsher treatment. One German pilot who was shot down over France was killed, but only after first having opened fire himself when his plane crashed near locals on the ground. On the contrary in Britain First Sea Lord Baron John Fisher “proposed shooting a captured German civilian for each British civilian killed in a Zeppelin raid.” A combustible man, Fisher almost resigned following the rejection of this plan, and indeed did resign shortly afterwards following arguments with Churchill on another matter. Kennett goes on to state that in 1915, “coroner’s juries handling the deaths provoked by Zeppelin bombs brought in verdicts of “willful [sic] murder” against Kaiser Wilhelm.”⁸⁵ There was an expectation that with further innovation and development aeroplanes could play a significant part in major war. This was not lost on military strategists, and as Richard Overy has argued, the character of war was changed by the First World War.⁸⁶ A new form of warfare brought with it the necessity of assessing civil defence in the face of attack from above. While Great Yarmouth was the first British town to be bombed it had, like other seaside locations, always been more vulnerable to attack than locations inland. What was clear from the Zeppelin attacks particularly on London in 1917 was that Britain could no longer rely on its island character and powerful navy as a form of effective defence. In total the Zeppelin and Gotha raids caused over 1,200 deaths in Britain during the First World War. While they raised fears in Britain they did not result in a collapse of morale.⁸⁷

Although “Fortress Britain” had been breached by the German High Seas Fleet as early as December 1914, the use of powered aircraft opened up urban areas further inland to attack

⁸⁵ Kennett, *A History*, 39.

⁸⁶ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Penguin, 2009), 177. See also John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Pimlico, 1991).

⁸⁷ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 20-29; Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, 20-92, 222-223; T. H. O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), 7-12. For further discussion of the use of bombing during the First World War, see also Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20-24, and Michele Haapamaki, *The Coming of Aerial War: Culture and the Fear of Airborne Attack in Inter-War Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 35-39.

and represented what Uri Bialer describes as a “loss of insular security”.⁸⁸ Susan Grayzel notes further that the air raids broke down boundaries between the war and home fronts.⁸⁹ This fact was recognised further afield than in Britain. As Peter Fritzsche has shown, the German councillor Rudolf Martin wrote as early as 1907: “To the extent that motorized air travel develops, England will cease to be an island.”⁹⁰ That London could be targeted without the need for a land invasion was of great concern. General Jan Smuts with Prime Minister David Lloyd George was given the task of addressing the situation. The first part of the report was of immediate use, addressing as it did the implications of bombing for civil defence. Of greater long term importance however was the second part of Smuts’ report, in which he called for the creation of an independent air force. Air power, in his view, was the future of warfare.

“And the day may not be far off,” he argued, “when aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centers on a vast scale may become the principal operations of war, to which older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate.”⁹¹

His conclusions were clear: the RFC and RNAS were already outdated, and should be replaced by an air force independent of the other sections of the military. He proposed the institution of an air ministry with control over all aspects of aerial warfare.⁹²

Italy and France led the way in their embrace of air power. Yet in the shape of the Royal Air Force (RAF) – founded on 1st April 1918 – Britain created the first air force which existed independently of army or navy control. Hugh Trenchard, who had ascended the ranks in the RFC before becoming Chief of the Air Staff, was greatly enthused by the potential of bombing

⁸⁸ Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), 2, 152.

⁸⁹ Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

⁹⁰ Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Flyers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38.

⁹¹ Report by General Smuts on ‘Air Organization and the Direction of Aerial Operations’, August 1917. See also Bond, *British Military Policy* 71-72 and Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane* 16-17.

⁹² Bond, *British Military Policy* p. 72, John Sweetman, ‘The Smuts Report of 1917: Merely political window-dressing?’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 4, no. 2 (1981), 152-174; and O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 9.

and championed the RAF over the following years. He recommended its use in the Middle East, as will be discussed later. Perhaps aware of the potential utility of air power in maintaining dominion and control over the newly enlarged Empire, the Air Ministry insisted that no German pilots be tried for war crimes pursuant to the attacks on London. To do so, they declared, would be to “place a noose round the necks of our airmen.”⁹³ When the policy of aerial control was indeed adopted, first in Mesopotamia then the wider Middle East, there “was no sign of discomfort at the adoption of an approach to warfare which had so recently caused the Germans to be branded as barbarians.”⁹⁴ Aerial bombardment was becoming an established practice.

Theorists

As discussed previously in the context of Futurism, a key figure in the development of the theory of aeroplanes as bombers was the Italian General Giulio Douhet. Best known for his 1921 book *Il Dominio Dell’Aria* (later published in English as *The Command of the Air*) he was an early advocate of air power. From Gavotti’s bombing attack in November 1911 Douhet recognised the potential of aerial bombardment as a powerful weapon in future wars. That Douhet was a keen poet and playwright is evident from dramatic passages in his articles and lectures which he gave during the mid-1910s. In a lecture in Turin in January 1913, just over a year after the first aerial bombing took place, he referred to Gavotti and went on: “A new weapon arose: an air weapon; a new battlefield opened: the sky; so very present everywhere that a new event took place in the history of war: the principles of war in the air.” The following year, in an article entitled *Futurism*, Douhet wrote that: “All true geniuses of war ...

⁹³ TNA: CAB/24/111/13. ‘First, Second and Third Interim Reports from the Committee of Enquiry into Breaches of the Laws of War’ (26th February 1920), 161.

⁹⁴ Charles Townshend, ‘Civilisation and ‘Frightfulness’: Air Control in the Middle East Between the Wars’ in Chris Wrigley, *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 158. See also Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 96.

broke all past traditions, revolutionizing the present, anticipating the future.” By this stage the First World War was underway and Douhet continued through the war to call for large-scale investment in an independent aerial wing of the military. Largely ignored by a contemptuous army he was kept away from positions of real power during the war.⁹⁵

In his own words, Douhet had “been harping on this theme for years, and I intend to keep harping on it”. *Il Dominio Dell’Aria* promoted Douhet’s vision of a large air force as the focal point of the Italian military. The book and its significance have been much discussed elsewhere; it is useful though to restate the main arguments. Azar Gat succinctly sums up the key themes thus: “Air power is the offensive weapon par excellence. Whereas civilian populations had traditionally been protected by the army, air power now made it vulnerable to attack.” The second point is of particular significance. Douhet was certain that by targeting the enemy’s civilian centres from above it would be possible to quickly end their will to fight. This principle would become central to the bombing doctrine of Sir Arthur Harris, the man charged with leading the strategic bomber offensive on Germany in the second half of the Second World War. Douhet began to assert some influence in Britain during the 1930s before a translation of his work was published in 1942.⁹⁶ Following Gavotti’s bombing attack in November 1911, Douhet recognised the potential of aerial bombardment and the importance in strategic terms of achieving supremacy in the air. He also noted, ominously, that aerial warfare would erase the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. By the time the second edition of Douhet’s book was published in 1926 the political landscape in Italy allowed his ideas more potential to be borne out in military strategy. Benito Mussolini became Prime Minister in 1922. Initially scathing of Futurism, he had later joined Marinetti in the push

⁹⁵ Gat, *A History of Military Thought*, 571-580.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 25, and Hayward, ‘Air Power’, 24-25.

for Italy to enter the First World War. They shared an enthusiasm for aeroplanes, and Mussolini was a keen supporter of the use of aeroplanes in warfare.⁹⁷

The following year the British military strategist J. F. C. Fuller published *The Reformation of War*. In it, he considered the prospect of aeroplanes playing a larger and more central role in future wars. He considered that air raids could only be considered immoral “if they cause greater harm than ground warfare”. Fuller though, crucially, while being in favour of bombing, did not believe that it could “produce an immediate victory”.⁹⁸

Douhet also found enthusiastic readers and contemporaries in Hugh Trenchard and Billy Mitchell, deputy director of the United States Army Air Service. Though Douhet’s work had not yet been published in English, Mitchell met the Italian in 1922 and soon after was quoting his work in internal Air Service papers. Trenchard and Mitchell had already met in 1917 and shared ideas on how to incorporate effective bombing into the prosecution of the war. By the start of the Second World War there was a clear philosophical difference between British and American bombing policy: while American doctrine held that precision bombing would be the focus, Trenchard supported the targeting of morale through civilian populations. “In practice”, writes Neillands, “the difference was small, but the difference in the underlying philosophy was considerable.”⁹⁹ Indeed, according to Richard Overy, it was only the RAF that reached 1939 believing that strategic bombing “would seriously act as a deterrent or, in the event of its use, so undermine enemy morale that it would force capitulation or the demoralization of enemy armed forces.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943); Gat, *A History of Military Thought*, 580; Joll, *Three Intellectuals*, 158-178.

⁹⁸ J. F. C. Fuller, *The Reformation of War* (London: Hutchinson, 1923). See also Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 111.

⁹⁹ Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 23-30.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (London: Europa, 1980), 13.

Other writers were less enthused than Douhet and Fuller by the prospect of greater use of aeroplanes in warfare. The British pacifist Helena Swanwick was worried by the developments, and foresaw a challenge. "The crime is in the total lack of international control which people have allowed to grow up: mankind is Frankenstein: science, especially the science of aviation is his monster. Can we learn to control it?"¹⁰¹ During the 1930s in Britain there were efforts, particularly from pacifists but with strong public support, to stop bombing. The book *Challenge to Death* edited by Storm Jameson was published in 1934. Among the more outlandish suggestions in it for ensuring an end to aerial bombardment was the proposal by Vernon Bartlett to ban the practise with the threat of transgressors being punitively bombed by all countries.¹⁰² In a psychological study Durbin and Bowlby argued that the only fast way to reduce the frequency and violence of war was to prevent aggression rather than cure the desire to kill. They prescribed action that was "immediate, coercive, and aimed at symptoms, the restraint of the aggressor by force." The book also contained chaotic visions of London under attack from the air.¹⁰³ Gerald Heard worried about "death in its most dreaded forms rushing down from the sky" and predicted a total societal breakdown. He warned, ominously: "One thing is clear : the nations are playing with fire to-day."¹⁰⁴ In the minds of those formulating military and colonial policy such questions were unimportant at the time. Not until the 1930s, with a second major conflict appearing to loom into view, did they begin to seriously consider how to combat attacks from above. In the meantime, the new type of warfare was too promising to ignore as a viable new way of controlling British colonies overseas.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Helena Swanwick, *Frankenstein and His Monster: Aviation for World Service* (London, 1934).

¹⁰² Vernon Bartlett, 'Security or Rearmament' in Storm Jameson (ed.), *Challenge to Death* (London: Constable, 1934), 179.

¹⁰³ E. F. M. Durbin and John Bowlby, *Personal Aggressiveness and War* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1939), 47-48.

¹⁰⁴ G. Heard, 'And Suppose We Fail?' in Jameson, *Challenge to Death*, 154-170;

¹⁰⁵ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 8-9.

Imperial policing

The end of World War One had seen the British Empire reach its greatest size and largest population. Yet the huge financial cost of the war, and the major defence spending cuts applied by Sir Eric Geddes, ensured that this would have to be managed on a reduced budget. With the new territory came the greater difficulty of how to maintain order cheaply and efficiently while simultaneously dealing with war-weariness accumulated by large-scale involvement on several fronts over the previous four years. Military and financial weakness placed particular strain on efforts to maintain control within the British Empire.¹⁰⁶ Since the late part of the nineteenth century Britain had been fearful of being overtaken as the leading world power by Germany and the United States.¹⁰⁷ The challenge of maintaining global supremacy with increased responsibilities and a decreased budget led to something of a power struggle as each wing of the armed forces sought primacy. Fewer people were joining the army in the post-war period, with reduced numbers at Sandhurst and Woolwich as parents became less keen for their sons to enlist. The army was in decline as the reality of a costly war and worldwide depression bit hard. According to Bond, "The atmosphere after 1918 was profoundly hostile to the very existence and purpose of soldiering."¹⁰⁸ These factors called for a new method of control; one which could put distance between British soldiers and the battlefield would be gladly welcomed. An opportunity to put air control to the test presented itself in early 1920, when the RAF was used to attack Mohammed Abdullah Hassan's Dervishes in Somaliland. The swift success brought about by this exemplary action was also very cheap. Bond estimates that at a cost of £77,000 it ranks as "one of the cheapest wars in modern

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as Superpower, 1919-1939* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 250-251.

¹⁰⁷ Barry Supple, 'Fear of Flying: Economic History and the Decline of Britain' in Peter Clarke and Clive Trebilcock, *Understanding Decline: Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

¹⁰⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy*, 6-12, 33-36.

history”.¹⁰⁹ This can be contrasted with the mainly land-based response to revolt in the Arab world in 1920-1921. Led by the army with controlled support from the RAF, the cost of this campaign ran to £40,000,000.¹¹⁰ Other factors are at play here; it is not reliable for instance to extrapolate and say that the RAF alone would have achieved the same results for £77,000. Their campaign in Somaliland was, for example, on a smaller scale. Nonetheless the almost contemporaneous nature of these two put-downs of revolts reflected poorly on the ability of the army to contribute economically to imperial control. It is also representative of the times: financial constraints ensured that what might be seen as “closer” control that the army would offer was no longer possible. Fieldhouse writes: “The fact that the RAF was put in control of security in 1922 symbolized that this was a new situation in the colonial world, for aeroplanes could intimidate and punish, not rule.”¹¹¹ Even champions of air power could not make that claim. The successful forays into aerial policing, coupled with the financial constraints of land campaigns, saw a move away from the “closer” control of the army to a more intimidating, punitive approach of air control.

This success vindicated Trenchard’s faith in bombing as a policy and led to Churchill’s decision to hand the policing of Mesopotamia to the RAF. This was to be effective from October 1922. So successful was the move in controlling unrest that by 1928 the RAF was in charge of policing the whole of the Middle East.¹¹² As Charles Townshend neatly observes, air power had the effect of “lengthening the arm of government while shortening its purse”.¹¹³ The policy was

¹⁰⁹ Bond, *British Military Policy*, 85.

¹¹⁰ Geoff Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 212-213. On the RAF justifying its growing influence through successful ‘policing’ actions, see also Haapamaki, *The Coming of Aerial War*, 42-43.

¹¹¹ David Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East: 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 114. On reduced military spending and the struggle within the armed forces, see for example G. C. Peden, *The Treasury and British Public Policy, 1906-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 128-189, and Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 22-23.

¹¹² Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 27-29.

¹¹³ Townshend, ‘Civilisation and ‘Frightfulness’’, 143.

not without its critics however. In 1921, shortly after the campaign in Somaliland, Secretary of State for War Sir Laming Worthington-Evans criticised Churchill's use of air power. It was not possible, he argued, to win the minds of men while bombing their wives and daughters.¹¹⁴ But this sense of conflict with those being bombed was undermined by the more tangible conflict between the separate sectors of the armed forces. Flight Lieutenant Claude Pelly wrote a series of letters to his parents in March and April 1925 describing his involvement in the bombing of local tribes. "This is the first show that the RAF have done on their own here and if it comes off it'll do us a lot of good – the army are frightfully jealous and are hoping we can't do it. Well, we've practically done it."¹¹⁵ The identity of, and impact on, the target of the bombing was subordinate to the power struggle within the British armed forces.

The uncertainty surrounding bombing was not confined to the political arena. While Britain was able to use the bomber as one method of imperial control, at home the public remained unengaged with the new weapon. The RAF faced the challenge of how to sell air power to a hesitant public. Having been conceived in the midst of the First World War the reasons for its creation – the effort to counter raids at home and to take the fight against Germany to the air – were no longer present. With this in mind the Hendon Air Pageant was first held in 1920 to help convince the public. An annual event, there were several goals. The displays were intended to show the safety, value for money and power of the air force, as well as giving an opportunity to show off to foreign dignitaries. More abstract and harder to measure, organisers were also keen on, David Omissi writes, "making the public more 'air-minded'".¹¹⁶ The aviation enthusiast George Holt Thomas had, before WWI, lamented as a "national

¹¹⁴ Townshend, 'Civilisation and 'Frightfulness'', 143-147.

¹¹⁵ IWM: 91/15/2. Private Papers of Air Chief Marshal Sir Claude Pelly. Letter dated 13th April 1925.

¹¹⁶ David Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920-37' in John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 198-202.

tragedy” the failure in Britain to embrace the new technology and despite the new found antipathy towards the army, it still had a greater profile than the RAF in public eye.¹¹⁷

In terms of engaging a wider audience the pageant was hugely successful. Attendances were good: generally increasing each year and peaking at nearly 170,000 people in 1931. Many thousand more watched the display from the surrounding fields and hills in north London. Those in attendance either inside or outside the gates saw the pageant close each year with a set piece mirroring a real-life situation, such as the Somaliland campaign. With a notable current of racism, the natives under attack were depicted as underdeveloped and in need of British control, discipline and influence. David Omissi writes: “By turning Africans into objects the exhibitions made the subject races of empire seem less than human, part of an untamed wilderness which it was legitimate, even imperative, to conquer.”¹¹⁸ This echoes the attitude of Pelly who was more aware of the conflict between the air force and the army than discomfited by any notion of bombing civilians. Their emphasised “difference” reduced any potential wider outcry. The writer Gertrude Bell, watching a display, was impressed by the demonstration of potential:

“They had made an imaginary village about a quarter of a mile from where we sat...and the first two bombs dropped from 3000 feet, went straight into the middle of it and set it alight. It was wonderful and horrible. Then they dropped bombs all round it, as if to catch the fugitives and finally fire bombs which even in the brightest sunlight made flares of bright flame in the desert. They burn through metal and water won’t extinguish them. At the end the armoured cars went out to round up the fugitives with machine guns. I was tremendously impressed.”¹¹⁹

The pageant was staged for the last time in 1937 as the need for pilots to train for a potential real conflict became apparent. Omissi writes: “the public had become fearful of bombing, if

¹¹⁷; George Holt Thomas, ‘The National Aspect of Flying’ in Graham-White and Harper, *The Aeroplane*, 235-245.

¹¹⁸ Omissi, ‘The Hendon Air Pageant’, 203-205.

¹¹⁹ Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer*, 214-215.

not exactly 'air-minded'".¹²⁰ This was the year of Guernica, which as will be discussed shortly, helped bring home awareness of bombing to a wider audience in Britain. This new knowledge and fear helped confer greater legitimacy on the RAF which was now secure in its own right and guaranteed a part in future war, whenever that might begin.

On the whole air control in the Middle East was considered a successful approach. Naturally these developments did not please those within the army, and this led to several years of cool relations between the two services. It was not until the latter stages of the Second World War that the army and the air force were genuinely cooperating with one another.¹²¹ The RAF was considered a young upstart which was diverting duties away from traditional methods of control. Bombing was also seen as a more brutal tactic than land campaigns, indiscriminately killing and therefore exceeding minimum force. Nonetheless, bombing native people was considerably cheaper than lengthier land campaigns, and the RAF defended bombing by arguing that it did in fact meet the legal criteria required. Mockaitis gives the example of a particularly successful "air blockade" on the Quteibi tribe in South Arabia. Air blockades were the practice of keeping tribes from normal life by bombing fields and disrupting daily life. The purpose was not to kill but to so disrupt daily life as to make surrender inevitable. In an attempt to force Quteibi leaders to give up suspected bandits the RAF dropped leaflets warning that air blockade would commence if those in question were not given up. When this did not yield results the air force bombed fields and a small number of buildings. By sustaining this approach daily life became impossible and ultimately the suspects were handed over. This

¹²⁰ Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant', 215-216. On 'air-mindedness' see also Marc Wiggam, 'The Blackout and the Idea of Community in Britain and Germany' in Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp and Richard Overy, *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe: 1940-1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), 44-47.

¹²¹ Bond, *British Military Policy*, 145.

was cheap, and according to British records only seven people died throughout the campaign: all those fatalities caused by individuals tampering with unexploded bombs.¹²²

This changing atmosphere increased the RAF's share of workload in military campaigns and, coupled with massively reduced funding, saw the army deteriorate through the 1920s.¹²³ At the same time, accepting that the sites of the bombing attacks were too remote to arouse much attention back home, Townsend writes: "air control was a way of furthering such education [about what bombing could do] without impinging too sharply on civilized sensibilities."¹²⁴ Air power had its limitations however. Pretensions that the RAF could control the British Empire without ground support were swept away by unrest in Palestine. As Monroe argues, blockade and policing from the air "had worked in Iraq but was of no use in Palestine's built-up areas." This, and the fact that air control could not work to maintain order in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, seems supportive of the contention that Britain was using aerial bombardment as a deterrent and without the intention of destroying civilian areas and their inhabitants.¹²⁵

Britain was far from alone in using aircraft to police its overseas territories. In the first half of the 1920s Spain – latterly joined by France – was involved in the second Rif War as they tried, ultimately successfully, to suppress the rebellion of Moroccan Berbers led by Abd el-Krim. It was during this period of war that American volunteer pilots (under French command) bombed the town of Chechaouen in northern Morocco. With the men of the town away fighting, the majority of those killed were women and children. Commentators have highlighted similarities between this attack and the one that followed twelve years later on Guernica. According to Sven Lindqvist, it was at Chechaouen "that the taboo against calling in

¹²² Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 31-32.

¹²³ On the disproportionate allocation of military funding among the armed forces see Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 22-23.

¹²⁴ Townshend, 'Civilisation and 'Frightfulness'', 159.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East: 1914-1956* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), 81; Bond, *British Military Policy*, 87.

the air force of a foreign land to bomb one's own territory was first broken – and the taboo against bombing a city full of defenceless civilians, as well. Chechaouen laid the foundation for Guernica.”¹²⁶ Certainly the distinction between combatants and non-combatants was being eroded. In view of these links it is important to note that the young commander Francisco Franco – later to lead the Nationalist cause during the Spanish Civil War – was ascending the ranks in the Spanish army during this conflict. The spectre of racism was often found close to the heart of pro-bombing sentiment. King Alfonso XIII's expectation that Abd el-Krim's forces be suppressed as quickly and brutally as necessary to swiftly end the conflict is described by Balfour as “genocidal racism”.¹²⁷ The charge of racism toward those bombed was also levelled at Arthur Harris and Hugh Trenchard with regards those living in the colonies Britain bombed.¹²⁸ The words of one member of the RAF, Wing-Commander Gale, are particularly telling. “If the Kurds hadn't learnt by our example to behave themselves in a civilised way then we had to spank their bottoms. This was done by bombs and guns.”¹²⁹

Unrest in South Africa

With planes now increasingly used by states against civilians in colonies, the role of the bomber as a method of policing was becoming increasingly well established. Up to this point however states had only used bombing abroad. This changed in South Africa in the early 1920s with two particular events: the crushing of the Rand Revolt and the Bondelswarts Affair, both in the spring of 1922. Jan Smuts, by now Prime Minister of South Africa, was a keen supporter of aircraft as weapons; his report to the British Government having recommended their employment in future wars. He now turned to use aircraft against unruly South African

¹²⁶ Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 121.

¹²⁷ Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly embrace: Morocco and the road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 104-139.

¹²⁸ Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (London: Profile, 2007), 122, 164-165.

¹²⁹ Balfour, *Deadly embrace*, 135.

citizens. The Rand Revolt took place when, after several years of struggle for better pay and working conditions, miners took strike action in Johannesburg. After warnings in the press, air crews attacked with machine guns on a March morning and returned in the afternoon to drop bombs on those areas of the town populated by strikers. Krikler describes those on the ground as “hopelessly outgunned” by the “vicious exotica of aircraft” available to the authorities.¹³⁰ The targets were the striking white miners, but inevitably given the inaccuracy of the weapons, civilians suffered. The City Times described the scene thus: “It was a pitiful procession—panic-stricken women hurrying along with their little children dragging at their skirts.”¹³¹ As Krikler further notes, bombing had an extra potency at this time: men shell-shocked by events in the Great War would be particularly scared by the bombers.¹³²

China and Abyssinia

As the 1930s progressed the spectre of another European war began to loom large. Many expected another war to break out sooner rather than later and politicians and military strategists began to prepare more seriously for the outbreak of war. The Spanish Civil War was the event which brought the prospect of a global war to the British public. Yet other events in the 1930s also drew British observers and their views give an indication of increasing engagement with bombing. Through the 1930s Japan was aggressively pursuing expansion in China. By 1937 hostilities had escalated to outright war. Bombing planes were a key feature of the Japanese attack. Of bombing in the inter-war years, Richard Overy writes about the “mystique which made it both threatening and exhilarating at the same time.”¹³³ W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood visited China during this period and their book, *Journey to a War*,

¹³⁰ Jeremy Krikler, *White Rising: The 1922 Insurrection and Racial Killing in South Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 256-280

¹³¹ Deryck Humphriss and David G. Thomas, *Benoni, Son of my Sorrow* (Benoni: Town Council of Benoni, 1968), 209.

¹³² Krikler, *White Rising*, 280.

¹³³ Overy, *The Air War*, 3. See also Clayton, *The British Empire*, 326-7.

captures something of this paradox with appraisals of aerial bombing. They are explicit in their opposition to bombing as a policy. Yet the passages in which they address bombing that they witnessed do not give indications of outright fear. Rather bombing made them both nervous and excited. Isherwood writes: “It was as tremendous as Beethoven, but wrong – a cosmic offence, an insult to the whole of Nature and the entire earth. I don’t know if I was frightened. Something inside me was flapping about like a fish.” Later he describes being too distracted by books in the library of their host to watch (or presumably worry about) a big air-raid on the town. This indifference to the planes above them should not be read as acceptance of bombing as a legitimate form of warfare. A passage lamenting the dislocation, terror and perversion of normal life brought by war includes the line: “War is bombing an already disused arsenal, missing it, and killing a few old women.” Though evidently intrigued by the bombing they witnessed, here is a clear note of condemnation.¹³⁴

With imperial European powers already having used bombers in their colonies and in wars of expansion they had an idea of the potential of this new technology. As such the Italo-Abyssinian war of 1935-1936 was not only important in Italian plans for colonial expansion into Africa. It also gave the Italian air force the opportunity to test the results of Douhet’s theories. In his biography of the journalist George Steer, Nicholas Rankin describes the war of 1935-1936 as “the laboratory of air power.”¹³⁵ I will return to Steer in more detail later as he was a key figure in the reporting of the Guernica raids, but his presence in Ethiopia during the war is also of significance. His time there produced a book, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, in which he describes the massive inequality between the respective fighting forces of the belligerent nations. Air

¹³⁴ W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), 17-38, 61, 92-93, 105, 192.

¹³⁵ Nicholas Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* (London: Faber, 2004), 45.

power gave Italy the opportunity to cause destruction and disarray with very limited risk to their own fighters.¹³⁶

Public opinion before the Second World War was hard to grasp and assess accurately.¹³⁷ Yet the years preceding the Spanish Civil War had already given keener-eyed observers cause for great concern. If the bombing of Chechaouen went largely under the radar then there was an increasing awareness of foreign affairs – and of the use of aerial bombardment – in the years immediately running up to Guernica. Indeed, Daniel Waley saw the Italo-Abyssinian conflict as a marker on the path towards wider public consciousness of foreign affairs. He contends that the “general current of interested opinion in Britain can be diagnosed with some confidence. In the main it held that the Abyssinians were the wronged party; they were seen as victims of a stronger power and pitied as such.”¹³⁸ We can also identify similar sentiments to those expressed by Auden and Isherwood in a published diary kept by J. W. S. Macfie of his time in the British Ambulance Service in Ethiopia. He writes dispassionately about the bombing and seems to exhibit little fear himself.¹³⁹ Another member of the Ambulance Service, John Melly, was overtly scathing of both the Italians for their actions and the wider world for the lack of intervention. He wrote in a letter: “This isn’t a war, it’s the torture of tens of thousands of defenceless men, women and children with bombs and poison gas...and the world...passes by on the other side.”¹⁴⁰ Sven Lindqvist has asserted that it was not until the bombing of Guernica that there came a new realisation amongst British people that they, as Europeans, could be targets. Guernica was indeed the event which sparked widespread public shock and outrage.

¹³⁶ George Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia* (London: Faber, 1936).

¹³⁷ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 16.

¹³⁸ Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-6* (London: Morris Temple Smith, 1975), 136-138.

¹³⁹ J. W. S. Macfie, *An Ethiopian Diary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 64-66. See also Brian Sheldamardine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 159.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica*, 54.

To others, more aware of world events, Guernica seems to represent a tipping point rather than a single isolated shock.¹⁴¹

Whatever the criticism aimed at the aggression shown by Japan and Italy, the bombing which took place in China and Abyssinia respectively was not on a scale which would compare to another European war, were one to break out. This was recognised by the Chiefs of Imperial General Staff who predicted much worse for the increasingly likely Second World War. As Uri Bialer writes, there was an appreciation that neither conflict could be used as an accurate guide as to what might happen in Europe: “neither these nor any other air raids of the second half of the 1930s had involved the huge concentration of aircraft that would be available in the event of an Anglo-German war.”¹⁴² Following the bombing of London during the First World War, the reports from Abyssinia and China ensured that anticipation of a war in the near future would include fear of heavy bombing in Britain. Bialer adds that by the early 1930s there was a growing awareness of an increased likelihood that Britain could be drawn into a European war, making this prospect “frighteningly real.” The awareness of a threat to civilians in Britain extended to “ordinary citizens”.¹⁴³ These fears would soon increase given the larger number of international observers and much greater interest in the Spanish Civil War.

Spain

The Spanish Civil War aroused greater passions in Britain than any other conflict with an aerial element since the First World War. Geographical proximity to the theatre of war ensured comprehensive media coverage and high levels of public interest, while the presence of the International Brigades in Spain guaranteed strong political interest in Britain. Most people had

¹⁴¹ Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 160. On the importance of geographical proximity in shaping public attention and fears, see also Grayzel, “A promise of terror to come”, 60-61.

¹⁴² Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 144

¹⁴³ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 2, 12.

an opinion on the war and politicians, media outlets and members of the public chose sides quickly. Support for each side fluctuated with the fortunes of war. What is clear however is that the bombing of Spanish towns and cities, and Guernica in particular, carried more gravity than attacks in other parts of the world. With British attention already focused on Spain the April 1937 raids came both to symbolise the atrocities committed by Franco's Nationalists (as the tide of public support turned towards the Republican cause Nationalist atrocities gained more attention, although both sides used terror during the war) and herald the real and terrifying age of aerial bombing.¹⁴⁴

In the early stages of the war photographic evidence of the material damage caused by the fighting was scarce. Susan Sontag has cast the Spanish Civil War as the end point of an era where war photography "seemed almost like clandestine knowledge."¹⁴⁵ She refers directly to Virginia Woolf's 1938 essay *Three Guineas*, in which the author addresses the question of how war might be prevented. Referring to photographs sent to Britain by the Spanish government depicting the destruction caused, Woolf continually returns to the theme of dead bodies and ruined houses that are the feature of the photographs. These fit the mould that Bernhard Rieger describes of graphic reports on air accidents accompanied by photographs: the reports "noted the destructive violence of accidents and determined their impact on the human body and psyche."¹⁴⁶ In an early passage of *Three Guineas* Woolf describes a scene synonymous with war photography from WWII to conflict in the Middle East: that of a bombed house of which part still stands. The missing side of the house affords the viewer a glimpse of what life was like before it was torn apart by bombing:

¹⁴⁴ Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Clayton, *The British Empire*, 348.

¹⁴⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), 21.

¹⁴⁶ Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 53-57.

“But certainly those are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a birdcage hanging in what was presumably the sitting-room, but the rest of the house looks like nothing so much as a bunch of spillikins suspended in mid-air.”¹⁴⁷

Again this is consistent with Rieger’s assessment of accident site reports and photographs:

“Disaster scenes struck observers as disjointed sites of chaos.” In an echo of No Man’s Land in the First World War, the sites of accidents (and, presumably for Woolf, bomb sites) blur the borders “separating the world of the living and the realm of the dead.” Woolf continues later that our reaction to war binds us, for whatever the individual background we respond with “horror and disgust” to death and destruction. She writes that “our sensations are the same; and they are violent.”¹⁴⁸

Many of the themes of leftist concern for the events in Spain were voiced in the Duchess of Atholl’s book *Searchlight on Spain* which she began writing at the end of 1937. A firm supporter of the Republican cause, she notes the rapid change in General Franco’s spoken policy on bombing Madrid. In the middle of August 1936 the Nationalist leader “declared that he would never bombard Madrid on account of the innocent people living there.”¹⁴⁹ Yet on 30th October this policy changed with the beginning of “a period of air raids which hurled destruction on non-combatants, men, women and children, and spared neither churches, hospitals, nor even the Prado.”¹⁵⁰ Another common complaint among British supporters of the Republicans was that in following a policy of non-intervention, the British government was in effect intervening on the side of the Fascists: by allowing evidence of German and Italian support for the Franco forces to go unchallenged the Republicans suffered. In a retrospective of *Manchester Guardian* coverage of the Spanish Civil War, the editors noted that the “majority of letters to the editor of the ‘Manchester Guardian’ were critical of the British

¹⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 164-165.

¹⁴⁸ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 210-213, 252, 277, 292, 296.

¹⁴⁹ Atholl, K. M. *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), 117.

¹⁵⁰ Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* 117.

Government's policy."¹⁵¹ Atholl's conclusion was bleak; she feared for the future of a Nationalist Spain:

"General Franco's complete disregard for international law or humanity brings home to us what the issues are for the Spanish people. His victory would mean the crushing of all the elements in Spain that stand for freedom, for peace, for culture, for human progress, and the handing over of a whole people to a reign of terror."¹⁵²

It was during the Spanish Civil War that Nazi Germany, like other soon-to-be Second World War belligerents before them, had the chance to test their air force. Forbidden by the Versailles Treaty from producing or buying armed aircraft, they were unable to openly test the capability of those which *were* being built. With the Nazi government keen to ensure victory for Franco in the Spanish Civil War, German squadrons were sent to Spain to aid the Nationalist cause. Attacks were made against Madrid and Barcelona throughout the war and were focused on a number of Basque towns in the early months of 1937. Brett Holman wrote recently that the attack on Guernica was just one of a number during the Spanish Civil War which provoked fear of impending bombing back in Britain. Attacks on Barcelona aroused particular concern due to the perceived "large city" link between Barcelona and London.¹⁵³ In 1938 John Langdon-Davies, who worked as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War, suggested specifically that the air raids on Barcelona gave an insight into what an attack on London might be like.¹⁵⁴ Yet the attack on Guernica in late April 1937 is most apt for consideration here for the outrage caused at the destruction of a small town. As Richard Overy writes: "No single event played as large a part in confirming for the European public that the bombing of cities and civilians was now to be an established part of modern warfare."¹⁵⁵ The number of people killed in the raid remains unclear: current estimates suggest a total of

¹⁵¹ R. H. Haigh, D. S. Morris and A. R. Peter, *The Guardian Book of the Spanish Civil War* (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1987), 134.

¹⁵² Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, 239-256.

¹⁵³ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, 203-207.

¹⁵⁴ John Langdon-Davies, *Air Raid* (New York: Haskell House, 1938), 13.

¹⁵⁵ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 33.

between 200 and 300, with many hundred more injured. Much of the town centre was destroyed. The details of the attack have been comprehensively discussed elsewhere but it is worth discussing the key details.¹⁵⁶

An air base near to Guernica hosted German planes under the command of Wolfram Freiherr von Richtofen. On 26th April – market day in Guernica – German planes attacked the town. At this point in the war Guernica had not previously been bombed and, not considered a likely target, did not contain any air defences. The majority of the bombs fell on the centre of the town, and left the supposed target, the Rentería Bridge, untouched. There was theoretically a military rationale in targeting Guernica: it was a communications centre close to the front. Nonetheless this fact alone does not explain the severity of the attack. Stuka dive bombers, the most accurate planes then available to von Richtofen, were not used, and the Rentería Bridge was not damaged by the attack. Hugh Thomas argues that at least in part, civilian panic must have been an aim of the attacks. Much of the horror at bombing in this period and beyond often came from the realisation that bombers could not with any accuracy distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, nor were they intended to.¹⁵⁷ Since Spanish citizens were the victims of new technology now available to bomb much more comprehensively than during the First World War, Esenwein and Shubert describe this as the first de facto area bombing of European citizens.¹⁵⁸

Guernica, by virtue of its location in a western European country, immediately caught the kind of widespread attention that escaped the Italian campaign in Abyssinia and the Japanese attacks on Manchuria. While Ethiopia and China were too remote to have a serious impact in

¹⁵⁶ Ian Patterson gives a clear and concise account of the details of the attack on Guernica. Patterson, *Guernica and Total War*, 24-30.

¹⁵⁷ Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts, *The Day Guernica Died* (London: Hodder, 1975), 236; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1961), 608.

¹⁵⁸ George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context 1931-1939* (Harlow: Penguin, 1995), 199-200.

Britain, Spain was a relative neighbour.¹⁵⁹ In a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* ostensibly about the realities of non-intervention H. Smalley from Chipstead in Surrey voiced the genuine fear that Guernica symbolised for the British:

“The ‘front line’ of democratic civilisation was once in far Manchuria, but through the incompetence of our politicians and the perfidy of the diplomats it shifted to Abyssinia, and again, owing to the democratic countries being betrayed by their Governments, it is now in Spain – nearer and nearer it creeps.”¹⁶⁰

The final five words chillingly echo the growing fear that British citizens would soon be the victims of aerial bombardment.

The bombing of Guernica brought with it clear reason to evaluate bombing attacks differently. The circumstances and the aftermath highlight three key reasons why it has come to represent the unacceptable targeting of civilians and why an understanding of the bombing of Guernica can help inform attitudes to bombing during the Second World War. Several British newspapers picked up the story from Guernica but it is the reports in *The Times* which have become best known. Due to the on-going Spanish Civil War, the South African-born British reporter, George Steer, was in Bilbao when the attack was carried out. Paul Preston describes Steer as having become more “foolhardy”¹⁶¹ since the early death of his wife Marguerite in January that year; a contention with which Steer’s biographer Nicholas Rankin agrees: “Steer did take chances in the Basque war, running more risks than the other journalists because he felt he had less to lose than they did.” He drove immediately to Guernica upon hearing of the attacks to see the damage caused by the bombing. Recognising the severity of the damage he wrote a report on the raid which appeared in *The Times* shortly thereafter. In doing so he offered the British public a first opportunity to learn about the grim details of the bombing.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 609.

¹⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Letters to the Editor | A Betrayal of Democracy’. 24th June 1937, 20.

¹⁶¹ Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die* (London: Constable, 2009), 320.

¹⁶² Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica*, 113.

These reports made the greatest contribution to the shocked response to the raids. Steer carefully described the history of the town before contrasting it with the effects of the raids. “[W]hen I visited the town the whole of it was a horrible sight, flaming from end to end.” Steer was also quick to set the attack into a broader historical narrative:

“In form of its execution and the scale of the destruction it wrought, no less than in the selection of its objective, the raid on Guernica is unparalleled in military history. Guernica was not a military objective. Guernica was not a military objective. A factory producing war material lay outside the town and was untouched. So were two barracks some distance from the town. The town lay far behind the lines. The object of the bombardment was seemingly the demoralization of the civil population and the destruction of the cradle of the Basque race.”¹⁶³

Over the course of the next few days Steer continued to send reports from the scene. So vivid were the images he described – outlining the suffering of those under attack – and so damning of German involvement, that *The Times*’ “carefully built reputation” in Germany was damaged and their correspondent Norman Ebbutt was expelled from Germany.¹⁶⁴ Steer’s first article was supported by an editorial which did little to smooth relations:

It is a tragic story – the pitiless bombardment of a country town, the centre of Basque tradition and culture, by an air fleet which encountered no resistance and did practically no damage to the scanty military objectives beneath it. The planning of the attack was murderously logical and efficient.¹⁶⁵

Paul Preston ranks Steer’s first report from Guernica among the three most important articles to be written during the war, and as having “more political impact” than any other.¹⁶⁶ Robert Stradling, meanwhile, argues that Steer’s reports turned Guernica into the key event which shifted British public opinion about the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ *The Times*, ‘The Tragedy of Guernica’. 28th April 1937, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Preston, *We Saw Spain Die*, 330. See also Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, 24-25.

¹⁶⁵ *The Times*, ‘Guernica’. 28th April 1937, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Preston, *We Saw Spain Die*, 308; *The Times*, ‘The Tragedy of Guernica’. 28th April 1937, 17.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Stradling, *Your Children Will Be Next: Bombing and Propaganda in the Spanish Civil War 1939-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 219.

Steer's reports are certainly the most famous from Guernica, but *The Times* was not the only newspaper to pick up the story. The *Manchester Guardian*, which five months before Guernica had noted that: "For German airmen, Spain at war is regarded as an excellent training ground",¹⁶⁸ inadvertently previewed its own later coverage of the Dresden bombings with hard-hitting reports that did not dodge detail. After their initial report appeared under a headline calling the raid a "massacre", the newspaper went on the following day to quote at length from a representative of the Basque Government in Paris. The statement was not intended to be nuanced: readers of the *Manchester Guardian* were given a frank assessment of the horror of the raids. Germany, supported by Italy, was, according to the statement: "conducting against us the most hideous and monstrous war of destruction that history has ever known." It continues to allege that "their plan is to exterminate the civilian population of the Basque provinces so as to terrify Bilbao into surrendering to them." The report also stated: "There is no escape from this horrible massacre. At Guernica, now a heap of ruins, they have destroyed the hospital, and all the wounded have been burned to death." Incidentally, this report also describes the "greatest feeling of anger in Paris"; significant as this was where the artist Pablo Picasso was based at the time. His part in the story will be examined shortly.¹⁶⁹

Two days after this report the *Manchester Guardian* gravely reported the implications of the attacks. "Guernica may be regarded as the most glaring example – more glaring even than the Italian methods in Abyssinia – of the full application of the 'totalitarian war' principle in so far as such a war must take no humanitarian considerations of any kind into account." The same piece carried a quote from a survivor of the raids, who ended by declaring it "nothing but a horrible bonfire".¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 20th November 1936, 11.

¹⁶⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Basque Town Wiped Out by Rebel 'Planes'. 28th April 1937, 11; *Manchester Guardian*, 'Basques Appeal to Britain and France'. 29th April 1937, 6.

¹⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Totalitarian War Methods'. 1st May 1937, 17.

As important as the presence of these reports are the letters to editors which appeared in the days and weeks following the Guernica attacks. Of the two major newspapers already discussed, the letters to the *Manchester Guardian* are most striking in their condemnation of the air raids. Peter Green, Canon of Manchester lamented what he saw as the epitome of “modern war”. It was an “awful massacre” of “innocent non-combatants”. Fearful of an unstable future, he warned: “If a European war comes, as seems all too likely, the scenes in Guernica will be repeated in every big town in Europe”. With reference to this letter a few days later, G. A. Sutherland voices succinctly the argument that Guernica marked the frightening new dawn of age of aerial bombardment. “This is not something horrible that happens in the uncivilised world; as Canon Peter Green says, it is modern war.” He was careful to point out too that though British people were rightly appalled by the events, their military was also building bombers. In the coming age of mass destruction from the skies, Britain was preparing for an active role. Basil Martin of Finchley Unitarian Church, north London, makes a similar point. “Why is it right for us to make bombs and wrong for others to use them? The horror I can understand, but not the righteous indignation.”¹⁷¹

In *The Times*, A. Ruth Fry, the prominent pacifist campaigner, linked the attacks on Guernica to British attacks on India.¹⁷² Another correspondent focused on the threat aerial bombing carried to cultural centres.

“Then we think of modern warfare. If a great war broke out, the loveliest cities in the world, such as Florence and Venice, and others which are storehouses of incomparable treasures like Paris and London, might, in a week or two, be lying as low as Guernica. The whole world would be the loser.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘The Massacre at Guernica’. 30th April 1945, 24; *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Guernica Massacre’. 3rd May 1945, 18; *Manchester Guardian*, ‘What Are Our Own Bombs For?’ 3rd May 1945, 18.

¹⁷² *The Times*, ‘The League and Peace’. 12th June 1937, 10.

¹⁷³ *The Times*, ‘Coronation and the People’. 25th May 1937, 12.

Less sympathetic to the plight of the citizens of Guernica was Hugh B. C. Pollard of Billingshurst, Sussex. Noting the arms industry in the town he argued that: “There need be little sentiment for them” before signing off: “They are simply reaping what they have sown.” The reference was to the arms factory in the town in which some local people worked. He was rebuked however on the letters page two days later by Frank Milton of the Reform Club, London. Milton, who stated that Steer’s report: “made one nearly physically sick”, highlighted the failure of Pollard to address the fact that while a small number of people in Guernica manufactured arms, the victims of the attacks were ordinary townspeople. His closing retort to Pollard raises a smile:

“If it should ever happen (which heaven forbid) that the little town of Billingshurst should be razed to the ground and the excuse be given that certain persons in that part of Sussex were Communists, I hope that, as the avenging bombs fall on his house, Major Pollard will remember to take a realistic and not a sentimental view of the situation.”¹⁷⁴

The sentiments of Milton, not Pollard, were the norm: an indication of the effect of the Guernica raids on the British public.

Soon after the attack Pablo Picasso, low on inspiration for a picture he had been commissioned to paint for the upcoming Paris World Fair, found his subject. He painted *Guernica*, which would become one of the most iconic artworks of the twentieth century. For Dietmar Süß, it was Picasso who brought the subject of aerial warfare to wide public attention, while for art historian Ellen C. Oppler, the painting would “make the name Guernica symbolise the barbaric destructiveness of war for decades to come.”¹⁷⁵ In two separate exhibitions around the end of 1938 approximately 18,000 members of the British public went to see the picture.¹⁷⁶ Preston

¹⁷⁴ *The Times*, ‘Bombing of Guernica’. 3rd May 1945, 10; *The Times*, ‘Guernica and Elsewhere’. 5th May 1945, 12.

¹⁷⁵ Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 42, and Ellen Oppler, *Picasso's Guernica* (New York: Norton, 1988), 57.

¹⁷⁶ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 336-337.

states that: “with the aid of Picasso’s searing painting, it is Guernica that is now remembered as the place where the new and horrific modern warfare came of age.”¹⁷⁷

Guernica therefore had George Steer and Pablo Picasso to bring details of the events to a wide audience. They are two of the reasons for its prominence in the discourse on civilian bombing. While the physical detail of this attack is similar in nature to a number of other raids in the previous two decades, the works of a journalist and an artist brought considerably more attention to Guernica. As important however is the third reason, concerning the location of the attack: not Spain specifically but Europe. Hitler and Mussolini’s bombers had proved that the methods used to ‘police’ the ‘savages’ in far-flung colonies could just as easily be used on European civilians. Bombing, until recently a tool of control which elicited intrigue as much as it did fear, was thrust into the minds of a concerned public in Britain. As concerns that imminent world war was inevitable became more deeply rooted, they were entwined with the fear of bombs falling. Guernica had the effect of making bombing appear real to the British public, who were suddenly aware that they too could be targets. That planes could destroy a town so quickly seemed to support the words of then Lord President of the Council, Sir John Anderson. He described aerial bombardment as: “not a mere development of something already known. It is something quite outside all human experience; and this is only the beginning.”¹⁷⁸

The international outrage provoked by the story caused great discomfort within the controlling ranks of the Nationalists. While Franco had approved bombing as a policy and enthusiastically welcomed the support of German and Italian pilots, he was reported to be furious at the consequences of the Guernica raids. What followed over the next days and months was denial from the Nationalists that the town had been bombed, instead passing responsibility onto the

¹⁷⁷ Preston, *We Saw Spain Die*, 309.

¹⁷⁸ Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 163. See also Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 161-162.

Basques themselves. This lie was maintained, if scarcely believed anywhere, until Franco's death in 1975.¹⁷⁹

In so many ways Guernica represents not only the worst outrage so far but also a warning of much worse to follow. For Germany, it represented a successful experiment in bombing. Like the experiments in colonies in the Middle East earlier, which Geoff Simons describes as "useful laboratories for new weapons" for Britain, Germany had proved the power of the Luftwaffe.¹⁸⁰ Adding the activities of the French and Italian forces in their areas of colonial interest, these four major European powers had the results of experimentation with air power by the start of the Second World War. Another particular significance of the Guernica attack was the confirmation of British assumptions that in the next major conflict aerial bombardment would be an inescapable factor. Illusions to the contrary had been increasingly hard to maintain, and were definitively shattered by Guernica and evidence of German involvement. Initial noises from Germany had seemed to show willingness on Hitler's part to negotiate over how to ensure civilian centres were not targeted by bombers in war. He later went on to speak of the possibility of gradually moving towards the total banning of bombing, to the extent that bombers would no longer be built. Quite apart from fact that Hitler was already rearming Germany in contravention of the Versailles Treaty, the suggestion in itself was disingenuous given Germany's then weaker air force (although this gap was narrowing): a ban on aerial bombardment would on balance strengthen Germany in any conflict with Britain and France.¹⁸¹ Indeed, that air staff did not expect an agreement to materialise is evident from two key factors. First was the contention that from 1935 onwards, expansion to the RAF was reactive to the growth of the Luftwaffe: recognition that Germany was now a likely enemy in the short-term future. Second are the words from a memorandum of late the following year.

¹⁷⁹ Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish*, 30; Patterson, *Guernica and Total War*, 17; Preston, *We Saw Spain Die*, 328-332.

¹⁸⁰ Simons, *Iraq: from Sumer*, 214.

¹⁸¹ Clayton, *The British Empire*, 253-257, 280-281; Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 106-117.

In it appears a passage which may have been interpreted as an appraisal of possible enemy actions, but could equally be a dose of realism as to how Britain would conduct another war.

“It is necessary to face the fact that in war ethical considerations in themselves have ultimately no force. Past experience suggests therefore that the sole criterion by which any method will ultimately be judged is “Will it win the war or at least avert defeat?””¹⁸²

Following the general success of British aerial policy above the Middle East, it does not seem far-fetched to think that at least to some extent, here members of air staff were already considering how a bombing offensive would be used in another conflict. If the comment was borne at least in part out of scepticism over the faithfulness of Hitler’s words, it was not misplaced. His pilots had destroyed Guernica, and in doing so, ensured that, in the words of the journalist Frank Pitcairn: “International fascism was beginning to show its hand.”¹⁸³ Hitler later used a speech in the Reichstag in February of the following year to backtrack from any possibility of air agreement. This supports what Carr states: the attack on Guernica showed what a war with Germany might be like. “[T]o those who felt the aggressor might be Hitler’s Germany, Guernica, as a Foreign Office official scribbled in the margin of a dispatch, ‘told us what to expect from the Germans’.”¹⁸⁴ As David Edgerton writes: “In the 1930s the effect of bombing was assumed to be terrible and decisive.” Here at last was evidence of what it might actually be like.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, as Terence O’Brien and Michele Haapamaki have shown, the effects of bombing in Spanish towns and cities offered lessons which were used in Air Raid Precaution planning in Britain to estimate the impact an attack on British cities might have.¹⁸⁶

There is some disagreement both over how aware the British public was of the conflicts in China and Abyssinia as compared to the Spanish Civil War, and also over how significant the bombing of Guernica would appear in Britain. Some historians have argued that British people

¹⁸² Quoted in Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 107.

¹⁸³ Frank Pitcairn, *Reporter in Spain* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936), 53.

¹⁸⁴ Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 187.

¹⁸⁵ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 62.

¹⁸⁶ O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 121, 124, 283; Haapamaki, *The Coming of Aerial War*, 94, 97-100.

were, for the most part, unaware or at least largely unmoved by the battles further afield; that the Spanish Civil War woke many to the severity of wars overseas. Tom Buchanan for example contends that events in China and Abyssinia were too remote to have a notable effect on British opinion.¹⁸⁷ Richard Aldrich suggests on the other hand that all these conflicts away from Britain, relayed home as they were on newsreels, were the stimulus for many people to keep diaries.¹⁸⁸ Guernica has certainly now entered into a more popular conscience, and as Dave Boling wrote in the final pages of his recent novel, the raid “remains at the taproot of the assaults against civilian populations that the world still grieves on an all too regular basis.”¹⁸⁹

What is important to note here is that several commentators writing before the Second World War described the apparent stoicism with which civil populations dealt with aerial bombardment. The American correspondent H. Edward Knoblauch reported citizens of Madrid being more scared by the constant air raid sirens than the actual raids and the Duchess of Atholl suggested that they knew worse would follow if they surrendered. “Neither bombs nor shells nor shortage of food or arms, therefore, could shake the defence.” She highlighted the fact that work continued in the city despite the conditions, and professed amazement at the “fortitude” of the Basques in the face of bombing in Durango, Eibar, Bilbao and Guernica.¹⁹⁰ Knoblauch does paint a picture of panic and distress, but does not indicate that people were close to submission.¹⁹¹ Such a clear set of examples from different arenas of war may have appeared irrelevant to British military thought at the time, but they should not have been. That Arthur Harris would later concentrate so obsessively on landing devastating, knock-out blows from the air is jarring given these examples. No proof existed in all the varied bombing

¹⁸⁷ Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, 1. See also O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 103.

¹⁸⁸ Richard J. Aldrich, *Witness to War: Diaries of the Second World War in Europe and the Middle East* (London: Doubleday, 2004), 1.

¹⁸⁹ Dave Boling, *Guernica* (London: Picador, 2009), 370.

¹⁹⁰ Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, 118, 180-186.

¹⁹¹ Edward Knoblauch, *Correspondent in Spain* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 67/68. See also Pitcairn, *Reporter in Spain*, 124-129 and Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 154.

campaigns from Libya in 1911 to Spain on the eve of WWII that a knock-out blow could be achieved from the air. Even the massive assault on Guernica did not bring about a speedy victory: the war would continue for almost two more years.

What it did do was give British observers a clear demonstration of the power of aerial bombing. As Europe seemed inevitably headed for another major war the bombing of Guernica simultaneously raised awareness and fears of bombing in this country. Further, it cast a shadow over WWII which ensured greater scrutiny of the bombing campaigns which would play such a large and relentless role in the war.

Uncertain future

In January 1939 Winston Churchill wrote an article on the bombing of Spanish towns. A year and a half before his ascent to the position of British Prime Minister he used this opportunity to denounce the usefulness of such attacks. In Spain, as in China, he wrote that the effect of bombing had been “to animate and exhilarate the whole people.” It was a point he would repeat in another article later that year. The impact bombing had upon morale was, rather than dampening, one which created unity and resistance within the bombed communities:

The citizen who sees his cottage, his tenement, his home wrecked and his small belongings destroyed; who sees his wife maimed or child killed or worse, does not, in the virile races of the world, react toward surrender. He reacts towards resistance. He rises into fury. And fury in a righteous cause against intolerable wrong has not always proved vain. Therefore, in this dire strait to which the once-hopeful world of the nineteenth century has been reduced, we may, if the worst comes to the worst, say: “Let the tyrant criminals bomb.”¹⁹²

Churchill’s views upon this matter would evidently change as the Second World War took hold in Europe. Answering a question he posed on whether mass aerial bombardment could be used to “conquer a great nation”, he was dismissive. “I do not believe it will be tried because I

¹⁹² *Collier’s*, ‘Let the Tyrant Criminals Bomb!’ 14th January 1939, 12-13, 36.

do not believe it would succeed, and because intelligent men, however inhuman their mood, probably realise that it would not succeed.”¹⁹³

The shattering of Guernica roused the west to the possibility that they too could be targeted in aerial warfare. The fear of bombing through the 1930s seems to have led to an overestimation of German capabilities. Bond describes the widespread “obsession”, and indeed “delusion”, of “an immediate all-out German air attack”. He argues that:

“[M]ost of the Cabinet ministers believed in September 1938 that war would begin with a massive German air attack on Britain...No one, it seems, seriously questioned whether Germany even had the intention, let alone the capability, of beginning a major war in this fashion.”¹⁹⁴

George Orwell, writing at the time, feared that the British population would not be fully alerted to the danger of aerial bombardment until the first bombs fell on Britain. Having returned from Spain, where European citizens had first experienced terror bombing, he describes an England far removed from the Spanish turmoil; a peaceful and slow-moving country untouched by conflict. From this state Orwell “fear[ed] that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs.”¹⁹⁵ He does however appear to be writing about traditional Arcadian England: the green and pleasant land comfortably removed from the hectic pace of London. In this section of the country Guernica was the event which translated fears into reality. Tom Buchanan writes: “British opinion, already in a subdued panic due to the fear of mass destruction from the air, now for the first time witnessed the reality in terms easily transferrable to British towns.”¹⁹⁶

In either case, there would not be long to wait. Although in the early years of the war Britain and Germany engaged in mutual destruction by aerial bombardment, the course of the war

¹⁹³ *News of the World*, ‘Air Bombing is no road to World Domination’. 18th June 1939, 12-13.

¹⁹⁴ Bond, *British Military Policy*, 282-283.

¹⁹⁵ George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 221.

¹⁹⁶ Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, 29.

diverted German effort away from the bombing of Britain. Bomber Command continued to destroy German cities until the final months of the war. How this was received in Britain would be determined by several factors, including knowledge of bombing during the period described in this chapter. It is to Germany that the focus of this thesis will shortly turn, and to how British people responded to the early raids on Germany.

This chapter has charted a rapid development of aerial bombardment in less than thirty years. From Gavotti's ad hoc experiment through campaigns of colonial control by imperial powers, bombing developed to the point in 1937 that showed how a town could be effectively and quickly destroyed from above. It was at this point, with the devastating raids of Guernica, that the fearful possibilities of aerial warfare became more widely understood in Britain. With the outbreak of war in 1939 the portents were clear, and citizens of countries across Europe would quickly come to witness first-hand the effects of aerial bombardment.

Chapter 2 – Coventry, Mannheim, and the Question of Reprisals

On the night of 16th December 1940, RAF Bomber Command attacked the south-western German city of Mannheim. 34 people died in the raid, a fraction of the number killed in German cities on a regular basis later in the war. Damage was limited by the inaccuracy of the bombing. Yet the symbolic significance of this raid far outweighed the meagre results. This was the first British experiment in area bombing: the move from targeting pure military installations to the deliberate attempt to destroy the larger part of a built-up area.

The bombing of Mannheim took place during the height of the Blitz on British cities by the German air force. In the middle of November Coventry was attacked on a huge scale. 568 people were killed in the raid and major damage was caused to buildings across the city. One in twelve houses were destroyed.¹⁹⁷ The attack on Mannheim was, officially, a response to the attack on Coventry.¹⁹⁸ The Blitz would continue until the second half of May 1941. Two months later the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed a large audience at County Hall in London. He told them of the desire to strike back at the Reich on an even greater scale. To applause, he told the audience that this was what the British people were calling for:

“We ask no favours of the enemy. We seek from them no compunction. On the contrary, if tonight the people of London were asked to cast their vote as to whether a convention should be entered into to stop the bombing of all cities an overwhelming majority would cry, “No. We will mete out to the Germans the measure, and more than the measure that they have meted out to us.””¹⁹⁹

This chapter will examine in particular the level and nature of the response to the raid on Mannheim. More widely, there will be a focus on the extent to which the shift from latent fears to first-hand experience of bombing during the Blitz translated into coherent views on

¹⁹⁷ Gardiner, *The Blitz*, 139-155.

¹⁹⁸ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 262; Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 47.

¹⁹⁹ Winston Churchill speech at County Hall, ‘You Do Your Worst -- And We Will Do Our Best’. 14th July 1941. (<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/129-you-do-your-worst-and-we-will-do-our-best>; accessed 20th September 2014).

the simultaneous bombing of Germany, and the ways that it was manifested. The chapter will also show that the early experimentation with area bombing was approved by Churchill and the War Cabinet. Churchill's statement, that British people favoured a robust and expansive bombing campaign against German cities will be tested with regards to evidence of British opinion on reprisals at the time.

Guernica to Mannheim

By 1939 war loomed large on the horizon. The previous chapter showed how events particularly in Spain made science fiction predictions of mass destruction from the air appear real, and Uri Bialer has demonstrated how the increased use of air power impacted on politics during the 1930s. Stanley Baldwin's famous claim in 1932 that "the bomber will always get through" took the form of a grim warning rather than a threat.²⁰⁰ The bombing of Guernica and other civilian centres in Spain brought the spectre of mass destruction from the skies into sharp focus. Richard Overy describes the "raw nerve" touched in Britain by the fusing of knowledge about the effects of aerial bombardment in Spain and the increasing certainty that war would soon break out in Europe. Around the world a terrifying new form of warfare was being used against civilians, and there was now a very real prospect of this being experienced by the British population. Overy writes: "of all the elements of modern warfare bombing promised an apparently swift and irrevocable end to the civilised world."²⁰¹ Following the Munich crisis in 1938, 38 million gas masks were issued to British homes.²⁰² The atmosphere of "gloom" was mirrored by the press around the time of the declaration of war.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*. For discussion of the Baldwin speech, see pp. 14-15.

²⁰¹ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 334.

²⁰² Süss, *Death from the Skies*, 43.

²⁰³ Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, 128.

Yet in his autobiography the historian Eric Hobsbawm describes how on his return to England in mid-1939 a form of acceptance had taken hold. Michele Haapamaki describes a “quiet resignation” with which war was met after the uncertainty and fears of the 1930s. Such fears of war had necessarily given way to material preparations for aerial attack. By 1939 the British people were, according to Hobsbawm, “surrounded by the visible landscape of aerial warfare, the corrugated iron of shelters, the barrage balloons tethered like herds of silver cows in the sky. It was too late to be afraid.”²⁰⁴ Indeed, the new visual, political and technological landscape often brought excitement. This has already been highlighted in the work of Auden and Isherwood in the previous chapter, where they describe the bombardment they witnessed as being “as tremendous as Beethoven”.²⁰⁵ It can be seen again in the early war years as Britain adapted to life under the threat of aerial bombardment.

After an early flurry of bombing activity by both Britain and Germany subsided there was little similar action into the winter of 1939-1940 as both sides settled into the Phoney War. As this continued into 1940 the inactivity had a corrosive effect on home front morale: according to E. S. Turner this period had “all the exasperations of war, but no war.”²⁰⁶ Webster and Frankland outline British policy during this period as being one of caution. During the autumn “lull” in direct hostilities between Germany on the one side, and Britain and France on the other, the RAF was to hold fire. The policy would change in the event of German action which “looks like being decisive.” This would provoke heavy attacks on the industrial heartland of the Ruhr. The near-certainty of heavy civilian loss of life meant it would have to have been preceded by similar loss of life caused by German bombing or land advance.²⁰⁷ In any case air conflict was

²⁰⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life* (London: Abacus, 2003), 152; Haapamaki, *The Coming of Aerial War*, 185. See also O'Brien, *Civil Defence* and Leonard Mosley, *London Under Fire, 1939-1945* (London: Pan, 1972), 11-12.

²⁰⁵ Auden and Isherwood, *Journey to a War*, 61.

²⁰⁶ E. S. Turner, *The Phoney War on the Home Front* (London: Michael Joseph, 1961), 180.

²⁰⁷ Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945. Volume I: Preparation* (London: HMSO, 1961), 136.

not extensive at this stage and pre-war fears of immediate massive aerial attacks proved unfounded. In April 1940 Air Minister Sir Samuel Hoare stated the government's position on bombing German cities: "We will not bomb open towns. We will not attempt to defeat the Germans by terrorising their women and children. All that we will leave to the enemy."²⁰⁸

On the night of 16th March 1940 the Luftwaffe carried out an attack on a major British naval base located in Scapa Flow. The location, a body of water in the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland, had been bombed the previous autumn. Like the raids on Mannheim which would take place at the end of that year, the actual damage caused by the March attack at Scapa Flow was outweighed by its significance. The raid caused the first British civilian death and provoked a response by the RAF three nights later. Fifty bombers were dispatched to bomb a seaplane base at Hörnum, on Sylt, an island close to the Danish border. The damage was minimal but these two attacks marked the beginning of a pattern of attack and counter-attack; action and counter-action: a pattern into which the bombings of Coventry and Mannheim also fell.²⁰⁹

It was not however until September, and developments in what would later be termed the Battle of Britain, that the intensity of night attacks on cities was increased. As Richard Overy writes, the Battle of Britain was one of a number of German tactics of aggression towards Britain: it was not to be the one single factor intended to force Britain to "give up".²¹⁰ Stephen Bungay argues that it was Hitler's fear of the Royal Navy, rather than the achievements of RAF Fighter Command, which ultimately proved to be the bar against the invasion of Britain. Against a backdrop of high fighter losses on both sides in late August and early September,

²⁰⁸ Sir Samuel Hoare quoted in Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 62-63.

²⁰⁹ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 140.

²¹⁰ Richard Overy, *The Battle of Britain: Myth and Reality* (London: Penguin, 2010), 110.

German tactics were shifted to favour night-bombing of industrial cities from 7th September.²¹¹ Both sides were now increasing the weight of their bombing attacks and wheels were fully set in motion for the attacks on Coventry and Mannheim. Over a period of eight months British cities endured the Blitz as the Luftwaffe carried out raids night after night. London was bombed on 76 consecutive nights; half of the 40,000 who died did so in London. It was a raid on Coventry on the night of 14th/15th November which was pivotal in setting the future course of the bombing war. The city was undoubtedly a military target, housing as it did munitions factories. It had air-defences and had been bombed before. Yet the ferocity of the attack, which destroyed much of Coventry city centre, marked it out as qualitatively different to attacks on other cities. The scale of destruction and chaos was such as to give the RAF a blueprint for attacks on German towns – and the air chiefs soon set about planning a reprisal. A month after the raid on Coventry the RAF carried out its first area bombing of a German city. Though not greatly successful, the raid on Mannheim on 16th December 1940 marked a change in the nature of a bombing campaign which continued until the very closing stages of war. Robin Neillands writes: “The high ideals with which the RAF and the British government had entered the war were being rapidly eroded by the realities of the conflict”.²¹² The city – not what was in it – was now the target. The destruction of Hamburg and Dresden were the ultimate expression of area bombing, built on the back of methods of colonial control; of attacks on Chechaouen and Guernica. In Mannheim the RAF, having developed its techniques in control of the British Empire, made its first wartime contribution to area bombing .

²¹¹ Stephen Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain* (London: Aurum Press, 2001), 384-387.

²¹² Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 46-53. See also Gardiner, *The Blitz*, Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 117; and Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 43-45.

Historiography

Mannheim occupies a curious place in the historiography of the bombing offensive against Germany. In the Official History of the campaign, published in 1961, the communications sent between the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet in London and Bomber Command in High Wycombe ahead of the Mannheim raid are probed. The authors Charles Webster and Noble Frankland describe the attack, clearly, as “the first ‘area’ attack of the war”; “a new departure.”²¹³ Later the authors state that the raid on Mannheim became a model for attacks on Berlin, Hanover, Bremen, Cologne and Hamburg in the early months of 1941.²¹⁴ This book has served as a starting point for historians of the bombing campaign, yet only occasionally is the raid on Mannheim addressed. Even Frankland, in an individually authored book on the bombing offensive published four years after the Official History, chooses not to mention Mannheim when addressing the decision to shift towards area bombing.²¹⁵

In 1979 Max Hastings wrote that “[t]he Mannheim operation was an isolated episode that winter, but it was a foretaste of much that was to come.” This highlights an important issue in the story of the area bombing campaign. The December 1940 attack on Mannheim was, plainly, an exercise in area bombing. Hastings traces its importance in the build-up to a full area bombing policy, noting it as a marker Churchill used when assessing the bombing campaign through the winter of 1940-1941. Yet it was at that stage an experiment. Area bombing as a fully adopted policy did not come into being until 1942, and this may explain (if not really justify) the reluctance to place Mannheim squarely within the narrative.²¹⁶ In histories of the period in which the aerial bombardment of Germany is tangentially relevant,

²¹³ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 215, 225.

²¹⁴ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 330.

²¹⁵ Noble Frankland, *The Bombing Offensive Against Germany: Outlines and Perspectives* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 61.

²¹⁶ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London: Michael Joseph, 1979), 93.

the general consensus is to depict area bombing as having begun in 1942. As an approved policy this is true, but by default it writes out of history the earlier experimentation.²¹⁷ Hastings and Norman Longmate both buck this trend, at least to a degree. Longmate, writing in 1983, describes the new tactic of aiming at a built up area in Mannheim. "Area bombing, though still not acknowledged as such, had arrived."²¹⁸

In line with a wider historiographical trend of considering the impact of the Second World War on German civilians, the bomber offensive has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years.²¹⁹ Mannheim retains its position as a touchstone for commentators but there is a sense of either reluctance or ambivalence towards full engagement with the significance of the raid. Even Jörg Friedrich, whose book *The Fire* is highly condemnatory of the Allied bombing campaign, is reserved in his judgment of the Mannheim raid. He does not mark the event explicitly as a step on the road to Hamburg and Dresden.²²⁰ Two books which have contributed to the growing dialogue about the bomber war, but which typify the muted interpretation of Mannheim, are A. C. Grayling's *Among the Dead Cities* and Nicholson Baker's *Human Smoke*. Baker addresses the bombing and the preparations for it, and in doing so ensures his work departs from the work of other historians who do not reference the raid at all. Yet in spite of the evidence cited Baker does not present the raid as a decisive moment in the history of the aerial war.²²¹ Equally surprising is Grayling's approach. With reference to the Official History he discusses the impact of the raid on Coventry: explicitly, as shall be detailed below, the precursor to Mannheim. Further, Grayling includes an appendix listing the schedule of RAF

²¹⁷ See for example Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991), 39-41; Mosley, *London Under Fire*, 288-292.

²¹⁸ Norman Longmate, *The Bombers: The RAF Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 95-96.

²¹⁹ See for example Bill Niven (ed.), *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003); Friedrich, *The Fire*.

²²⁰ Friedrich, *The Fire*, 63-64.

²²¹ Nicholson Baker, *Human Smoke* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 263.

bombing attacks on Germany. The vast majority of these are presented with no comment: merely the date and location of the raid along with the size of the force sent on the mission and the number of aeroplanes lost. Casualty figures are presented for some of the more sizeable raids in the second half of the war, but of the raids in 1940 and 1941 only Mannheim is afforded any greater detail. In brackets after the name of the city, Grayling writes: “first RAF area bombing”. The significance, considering the aim of the book,²²² should be great, yet this is the only mention this attack on Mannheim is given throughout the work.²²³ The raid on Mannheim should be seen as the beginning of the area bombing campaign, rather than a precursor to it. Patrick Bishop begins to touch on *why* this should be case in his book *Bomber Boys*, without seemingly asserting that it *is* the case. He highlights the significance of the bomb-loads on the planes sent to attack the city, containing as they did a greater than normal proportion of heavy bombs and incendiaries. It was, he argues, “the shape of things to come.”²²⁴ It is important that we start to place greater emphasis on the intention of the attack. The lack of material damage ran contrary to what had been hoped for and speaks instead of the inability at that time of the RAF to accurately aim their bombs, even when precise and specific military installations were not the target. Air Chiefs hoped the attack on Mannheim would match the massive destruction seen in Coventry.

By considering the area bombing campaign as one of longer duration, we can also in some way lessen the share of blame which has been apportioned to Arthur Harris. It is not the intention of this paper to absolve the then soon-to-be Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command of blame for the scale of destruction wrought across the Reich in the later stages of the war. He has rightly been criticised for an unwavering belief in the value of area bombing even into the very final stages of the war when Allied victory was no longer seriously doubted. Yet at the

²²² The subtitle asks the question: “Is the targeting of civilians in war ever justified?” Grayling builds an argument that the bombing of civilians in German cities could not be morally justified.

²²³ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 43-45, 299.

²²⁴ Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, 31-32.

time of the Mannheim attack, when the RAF first experimented with area bombing in Germany, Harris had been Deputy Chief of the Air Staff for less than 3 weeks. His subsequent promotion to leadership of Bomber Command was still over a year away. By this stage, faith in the bomber had already been stated at the highest level. "The fighters are our salvation," claimed the new British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in a memorandum to the War Cabinet on 3rd September 1940, "but the bombers alone provide the means of victory." Churchill did not at this time make clear the way in which he envisaged bombers being used, but it would put to the test the statement made almost exactly a year earlier by his predecessor, Neville Chamberlain. "[W]hatever be the lengths to which others may go, His Majesty's Government will never resort to the deliberate attack on women, children and other civilians for purposes of mere terrorism."²²⁵ This position was echoed by Sir Samuel Hoare nine months later, as mentioned above. Throughout this thesis it will become clear that the policy of area bombing was enthusiastically approved at the very top of British high command. Harris's notorious place in the history of the Second World War is assured, but he should not shoulder the responsibility alone for the initiation of area bombing.

Viewed individually, sources which do not consider the Mannheim raid worthy of inclusion in the story of the bomber war do not tell an especially unusual story. As a collection of works however, the absence or minimal inclusion is surprising. The overall impression is that the small number of casualties on that December night in Mannheim precludes it from featuring prominently in the story of the aerial campaign. I would argue that this ignores the symbolism of the attack: the British were now prepared not only to consider direct attempts to obliterate cities, but to begin carrying it out. The authorisation of the Mannheim raid set the parameters of area bombing and ensured it became a written policy; one which would be developed and

²²⁵ Hansard Parliamentary Debates, Commons (hereafter Hansard): (Fifth Series) 1938/39, Volume 351. 14th September 1939, column 750.

effectively codified later in the war. The official switch to area bombing in February 1942 was, as Peter Gray has shown, an “incremental process”, the roots of which stretched back into the years before the Second World War.²²⁶ In terms of relative losses, the period of 1940-1941 saw a higher number of deaths to RAF personnel than to German civilians.²²⁷ But it set the tone for the second half of the war during which the balance would be thrown dramatically in the other direction. Without the willingness to attack Mannheim in the manner in which it was targeted, it is doubtful whether the far more devastating raids later in the war – those which have received the greatest attention from historians – could have taken place at all.

Operations

As early as 16th October 1940, the War Cabinet had realised the need to ensure that the British reply to German bombing was seen to be proportionate: that is to say that it should seem appropriately stern in response.²²⁸ On 2nd December the Air Ministry contacted Bomber Command and the British response to the raid on Coventry was officially underway. Explicitly, the nature and scale of the raid would be decided by the attack on Coventry: “as reprisal for concentrated attack on places like Coventry and Southampton...you should select and attack suitable similar objective in Germany”. The note continued: “With object causing widespread uncontrollable fires”.²²⁹

Two days later Bomber Command Operation Order No. 126 was circulated, its intention clearly stated: “To cause the maximum possible destruction in a selected German town.” The planned raid was given the code name ‘Abigail’ and expected to be carried out by over 200 planes. The operation order goes on to outline plans to first raise fires with incendiary bombs, before

²²⁶ Peter Gray, ‘The Gloves Will Have to Come Off: A Reappraisal of the Legitimacy of the RAF Bomber Offensive Against Germany’ in *Air Power Review*, 13, no. 3 (2010), 26-27, 31-33.

²²⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 519.

²²⁸ Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 201.

²²⁹ TNA: AIR 20/5195, Air Ministry to Bomber Command, 2nd December 1940.

dropping high explosives into the fires.²³⁰ Already the move away from precision bombing was taking shape – the aiming point for the bombers arriving later would be already burning buildings.

Through the course of the following correspondence – up the days immediately before the attack – the plans took further shape, gained authorisation from the War Cabinet, and saw a long list of German towns and cities evolve into a shortlist.

With the Operation Order complete Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, wrote to Winston Churchill informing him of the plan and proposing, in order of preference, Hanover, Mannheim, Cologne and Düsseldorf as potential targets. He advised that the attack would proceed once the Prime Minister gave his authorisation. Churchill's role in giving ultimate authority for specific air raids is important to note, and will be returned to throughout this thesis. His approval and subsequent denouncement of the devastating February 1945 attack on Dresden is regularly cited as evidence of his central involvement in the bombing campaign; it can be seen much earlier in the run up to the raid on Mannheim.²³¹

Portal's request for Churchill's authorisation was made on 4th December. When, eight days later, he had still not been given permission to proceed, he wrote again. "It is very important", he argued, "that authority for this operation should be given immediately". If adopted as new policy, such raids would be guided by existing fires rather than moonlight. However, the first raid was to be carried out in moonlight to ensure success. Since the raid was a response to an attack already four weeks past, Portal was concerned about losing the opportunity for another

²³⁰ TNA: AIR 20/5195, Bomber Command Operation Order No. 126. 4th December 1940.

²³¹ See for example Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 34; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume III*, 109-112; Maxwell Philip Schoenfeld, *The War Ministry of Winston Churchill* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1972), 100.

month. In a tone of urgency, he ends his letter: "Would you please let me know whether I have authority to go ahead?"²³²

Whether or not this letter directly sharpened Churchill's mind is unclear. Certainly the intention to raise the weight of bombs dropped on Germany chimed with the Prime Minister's own feelings at that stage. He had expressed a month earlier, in a minute to the Chiefs of the Air Staff, his disappointment and regret that more bombs were not being dropped on Germany.²³³ Whatever the trigger, the War Cabinet met that same night and discussed Operation Abigail. Though Churchill himself was absent, the Lord Privy Seal, Clement Attlee, stated that the Prime Minister "was in favour of a modification of our bombing policy against Germany." Portal told the meeting that it was "widely appreciated" that the German attack on Coventry represented a similar change in their approach to bombing Britain, and went on to say: "The Prime Minister had given instructions for plans to be prepared for retaliation in kind." It was now for the War Cabinet to decide whether the response would have "the object of causing the greatest possible havoc in a built-up area." Of the considerations outlined, two in particular stand out as important here. It was proposed to select a town with no or limited damage to date, "where the A. R. P. [Air Raid Precautions] organisation was unlikely to be in good trim." Not only the scale of attack but the potential for dealing with the consequences was, clearly, a decisive factor. Also of note, making clear the fact that morale was to become a target in itself, is the following: "Since we aimed at affecting the enemy's morale, we should attempt to destroy the greater part of a particular town."²³⁴

It was noted in discussion that what was being proposed amounted to a change of policy – "the diversion from strictly military objectives to a political objective, namely, the effect on

²³² TNA: AIR 8/865, Portal to Churchill, 4th December 1941, and CAB 65/16/12, Portal to Churchill, 12th December 1941.

²³³ Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge (hereafter CCAC): CHAR 20/13/8, 'Prime Minister's printed personal minutes, November 1940'.

²³⁴ TNA: CAB 65/16/12, 'Minutes of War Cabinet meeting', 12th December 1941.

German morale.” In the event it was decided that the original bombing policy should be upheld, but that an experimental attack should be approved. Two caveats were applied. Outwardly this attack was not to be deemed a reprisal for the attack on Coventry, and “no special publicity should be given to it afterwards.”²³⁵

The War Cabinet had met at 9.45pm on 12th December. At 8.00am the following morning the Air Ministry passed on the conclusions of the meeting to Bomber Command. One of the decisions passed on, given greater weight than in the conclusions of the War Cabinet, was: “No repeat no special publicity to be given to the operation afterwards”. Bomber Command drew up Operation Order No. 127 including the final list of three potential targets: Bremen, Düsseldorf and Mannheim. Mannheim – like Coventry, an important industrial centre – was given the code name ‘Rachel’.²³⁶ After the rapid confirmation of the plans, there followed two nights of precision attacks on other targets as the bomber crews waited for the correct weather conditions. When these arrived on the night of 16th/17th December, Operation Abigail Rachel took place.

It was not a major success. 134 planes were used in the raid. This represented the largest force sent to a single target at that stage, but well down on the suggested number of over 200. Many of the bombs missed the city centre. In total, there were 34 deaths and 81 injuries. What the raid lacked in major material damage though it made up for in significance. The operation showed that it was possible to concentrate a large force of aircraft on a single objective. The weekly situation report did in fact report the raid in positive terms. “The outstanding event of the week was the heavy and successful attack on Mannheim”, the report confirms. Later the report adds: “Aircraft visited the town on the two following nights and reported many fires still

²³⁵ TNA: CAB 65/16/12, ‘Minutes of War Cabinet meeting’, 12th December 1941.

²³⁶ TNA: AIR 20/5195, ‘Bomber Command Operation Order No. 127’, 14th December 1941.

burning after the previous attacks, and smoke hanging over the town.”²³⁷ Whether or not the raid itself was a success in terms of destruction caused to the town, as an experiment in area bombing (the objective the War Cabinet had approved) it was successful enough ultimately to form the blueprint for what would become the enduring symbol of the bombing campaign.

Any uneasiness about the nature of the attack (as manifested in the requests for authorisation from Churchill; the framing of the proposal as an experiment rather than a direct change in policy; the order for the attack to be treated like any other in reports) seems to have lifted over the following weeks. On 30th December Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command, Richard Peirse, wrote to Portal. He quoted from a translation of a German news bulletin from that morning which included reference to the resumption, after Christmas, of the “systematic destruction of English towns”. Peirse took the opportunity to press Portal for permission to continue the assault on Germany. Hannover had lost its place at the top of the preferred list of targets for Operation Abigail for a number of reasons. It had long links with Britain and it was considered that bombing Hannover might lead to a German attack on Oxford or Winchester. Peirse ended his letter to Portal with a plea: “I hardly think the Cabinet need longer feel soft-hearted towards Hanover or any other German town for that matter.”²³⁸ This calls to mind a passage in the memoirs of John Colville who, when talking about the later raid on Dresden, thought: “the accumulated horrors of the war hardened all our hearts”.²³⁹ Peirse’s reaction to hearing the German news bulletin suggests that this process may have begun much earlier in the war than Colville suggests. Indeed, Colville himself suggested in a diary entry on 13th December that Mannheim was a point of departure for the government. “The moral scruples

²³⁷ TNA: CAB 66/14/17, ‘Weekly Resume (No. 68) of the Naval, Military and Air Situation from 12 noon December 12th to 12 noon December 19th, 1940’. See also Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 48-53.

²³⁸ TNA: AIR 8/865, Peirse to Portal, 30th December 1940.

²³⁹ John Colville, ‘Memoirs’ in John Wheeler-Bennett (ed.), *Action This Day: Working With Churchill* (London: MacMillan, 1968), 86.

of the Cabinet on this subject have been overcome.”²⁴⁰ Although Portal told Peirse in reply that he could not at that stage attack Hannover, he did give him permission to repeat the Mannheim experiment. It was not long before the stance on Hannover changed: it was approved as a target on 9th January 1941. When Portal approached Churchill on 4th January for permission to go ahead with plans for another “similar operation”, there was no delay in the response. Written in red ink on the letter above the Prime Minister’s initials (before a typed reply was forwarded to Portal) are the words – “Yes certainly”.²⁴¹

What remains at this stage is to consider how effective the order was for Operation Abigail to be reported as any other raid. By chance, hours before the raid the Secretary of State for Air Archibald Sinclair had presented the Reports on the Effectiveness of the Royal Air Force bombing operations. He found that while reports in the press sometimes exaggerated the extent of bombing missions, crews returning from operations over Germany usually underplayed their role. He quoted from a Commanding Officer within Bomber Command, who said: “I cannot recall ever having had occasion even to suspect deliberate exaggeration by the crews. Quite the reverse, in fact. They are the first to criticise and belittle their own achievements.”²⁴² With this in mind and remembering the condition that no special attention should be given to the operation, the following comment from one pilot which appeared in newspaper reports undermines the attempt to keep reports restrained. “The biggest show I have ever seen...I got tired of trying to count the fires.”²⁴³ That such an account was able to reach published copy is surprising, more so given that those reports were pulled directly from the Air Ministry News Service (AMNS). Accepting that in a sample of one, the conclusion cannot be anything more than indicative, this does still suggest that the Mannheim attack

²⁴⁰ John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 311.

²⁴¹ AIR 8/865, Churchill to Portal (draft), 4th January 1941.

²⁴² TNA: CAB 66/14/13, ‘Reports on the Effectiveness of the Royal Air Force bombing operations’, 16th December 1940.

²⁴³ *Daily Express*, ‘Buildings ‘lifted into the air’ at U-boat base’. 18th December 1940, 5.

stood out. This quotation from the pilot managed to evade the stated concerns of the War Cabinet.

There is little else recorded on what was said about the raid on Mannheim by the RAF crews who flew in the raids. Nevertheless a number of sources from around this time can enable an understanding of how these people viewed this part of the war effort. Two Mass-Observation File Reports from the period give an insight into the mind-set of the crews in relation to attacking German civilians. One week before the raid on Mannheim in December 1940, a report for Home Intelligence discussed two RAF bases which, independently of one another, had organised debates amongst the volunteers. One ran with the motion: "Should we bomb Berlin?"; the other asked: "Should reprisal measures be carried out against civil populations?" Neither motion passed. Little is recorded of the main content of the debate but among the arguments against "included a kind of humanitarian outlook": this was not simply a rejection based on military efficiency.²⁴⁴ Two months later an investigator posted observations of the habits and attitudes of airmen based on a year and a half of war. Suggesting that there was "slightly less "reprisal feeling" than amongst civilians", the report goes on to note a very practical reason for why airmen might favour the precision bombing of military targets to the area bombing of cities. "[T]here is the craftsman's delight in a well-aimed bomb." Discomfort with the idea of bombing civilians is evident from the nature of the debates, but besides this, successfully identifying and striking a target seems to have been more satisfying to airmen than dropping bombs into already burning fires.²⁴⁵ There is evidence of this in the diaries of the airmen engaged in the bombing war. Flight Sergeant Peter Yeoman Stead was a young man during his time in service. When 21 years old he wrote in his diary: "I never expected to reach such an old age." Early in the war he showed a keenness for precision in the execution of his

²⁴⁴ M-O A: FR 521, 'Tenth Weekly Report for Home Intelligence'. w/e 6th December 1940.

²⁴⁵ M-O A: FR 569, 'Airmen'. 8th February 1941.

duties, and chided his co-pilot, who he considered: “very careless and [he] seems to have no interest in accurate flying”. His diary entries are largely cool and lacking in explicit displays of emotion. When another crew survived a crash landing only for one of the pilots to suffer a broken leg, he rather philosophically wrote: “Well such is life, luck for some bad luck for others, and work and danger for everyone.” His barometer for a “splendid” mission was the successful locating of targets. A raid on Duisburg in May 1943 was described as follows: “The attack appeared to be very successful. Fires were very well concentrated around the aiming point and there was no sign of wide bombing.” Stead rarely commented on the nature of the raids in terms of the conditions for those under bombardment, instead focusing on the level of accuracy and concentration of the bombing, although there are exceptions. On a mission to Mannheim in February 1942 he describes the fires as “angry sores in the heart of a trembling city.”²⁴⁶ Flight Sergeant Jamie Dunlop was far more conflicted by his role in the bomber offensive. He wrote a letter to his parents which was only to be opened in the event of his death – Dunlop was killed in October 1941. He asked that his parents did not mourn him since he saw his role as the defence of morality and religion. Yet he still expressed deep misgivings about his work. “I hate killing and suffering with all my soul yet I have killed and caused suffering. If I am to be excused it must be on the grounds that I killed the few to save the many.”²⁴⁷ A Mass-Observation diarist, who would later join the RAF as a Flight Officer, records in his diary the details of an argument he had with a friend about the possibility of bombing Germany. He takes his friend to task over comments about “teaching [the Germans] a lesson.” He writes that he told his friend that this would be ineffective; that evidence of bombing around the world didn’t suggest it led to a lowering of morale. Further, he challenged the reasoning his friend had given. “I told him, and I still believe it, that his urging of such

²⁴⁶ RAF Museum Archive, Hendon (hereafter RAFM): M10020, ‘Diary of FS Peter Yeoman Stead, 1940-1941’. Entries for July 1940, August 1941, February 1942, May-June 1943.

²⁴⁷ IWM: 99/64/1, ‘Private Papers of JLS Dunlop’. Letter by Dunlop, n.d.

vandalism and inhumanity springs only from feelings of revenge – from a desire to hurt someone because he has been hurt.”²⁴⁸

The content of a number of interviews with air crews conducted around this time are also instructive. These were made for the BBC for public consumption. Admittedly this is a small sample, but at this stage of the war the most telling interviews are those with Czech volunteers in the RAF. In an interview with a Flight Lieutenant Coleman made on 15th November 1940, the day after the raid on Coventry, he discusses a recent raid on Munich where Hitler “and some of his boyfriends” were thought to be celebrating the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. He goes on to describe the low height at which they were flying, coupled with the moonlight making houses and streets easily visible, as “a bomb-aimer’s dream.” The interview appears to be with a man confident of the RAF’s ability to strike at German cities, but he neither baulks at nor glories in this knowledge.²⁴⁹ By contrast, interviews with four Czech crew members recorded the following summer exhibit far more enjoyment of the treatment meted out to German cities. Two explicitly state that their joy at seeing Germany in flames is directly related to their nationality. One Czech pilot realised on flying towards Berlin to bomb the city that the target was already in flames. He described the feeling as “very comforting to my heart as a Czech.” Another describes it as “a real pleasure for me as a Czech to see Berlin on fire.” A raid on Münster in North-West Germany is described as “something like Coventry” due to the scale of the fires, and the pilot expresses his hope that the attacks “will even increase in the future.” The starkest expression of satisfaction at the bomber offensive comes from a Czech wireless operator. In his interview he discussed a raid on Kiel in the very north of Germany. Despite

²⁴⁸ M-O A: D 5103, diary for 19th November 1940.

²⁴⁹ RAFM: X003-6315, ‘Recording in which Flt Lt Coleman describes a night bombing raid on Munich’. 15th November 1940.

lamenting the “terrible war”, he describes the scene below his plane as follows: “It was lovely...in all the towns it was fire: fire, fire, fire. It was very good.”²⁵⁰

Air Vice Marshal Sir Hugh Pughe Lloyd kept a brief diary during the winter of 1940-1941, during which time he was Senior Air Staff Officer for 2 Group, Bomber Command. In it, he records in a warning tone his thoughts of the use of bombers around a month after the attack on Mannheim. The intended size of the attack seems at odds with his own views on how the bomber offensive should be conducted. As early as September he had indicted deep concern:

“It may be war to the crew in the air as they are in deadly peril of their lives from attack – so are the people on the ground – the civilians – but they are defenceless. It seems we have all gone mad. It is amazing to think in this 20th century that we should seek to destroy each other in this way.”

After what he calls a “lull” in his diary, he wrote in January:

“We must only use the Bombers as the bait and the sting and not as routine. We must stick to our object.

But already the Prime Minister has gone big on it. The Press made too much of a song on the “offensive”. So instead of one Squadron we now have two Squadrons for the next show. This was never intended. One extra Squadron means one less for our nights on Germany already very little and very very disturbing.”²⁵¹

The attack on Mannheim was not just another attack on military installations in Germany. That fact is clear from the documents sent during the planning phase of the attack, as described above, and the changing nature of bombing policy is seemingly confirmed by a remarkable speech given by Sir Richard Peirse in November 1941. Peirse was Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command at the time, although he was soon to be replaced by Arthur Harris, whose appointment roughly coincided with the official shift to area bombing. Peirse’s speech was

²⁵⁰ RAFM: X003-6390, ‘Recording in which a Czech bomber pilot describes raids over Berlin, Emden, Bremen, Brest and Munster’; X003-6391, ‘Recording in which two Czech pilots describe a raid on Berlin and their feelings at seeing the city on fire. 22 August 1941’; X003-6393, ‘Recording in which a Czech wireless operator describes a raid on Kiel’. 22nd August 1941.

²⁵¹ RAFM: B1723. ‘Commentary on operations by Bomber Command by AVM Sir Hugh Pughe Lloyd, Senior Air Staff Officer 2 Group, 15 April 1940-20 January 1941’. Diary entries for 26th September 1940, and 20th January 1941.

given at a private dining club in London. It is worthy of lengthy quotation here. After discussing the use of bombing as an instrument of blockade, Peirse continued:

“But, complementary to all these methods of material destruction, is the attack on the people themselves; the disruption of normal life; the annihilation of homes; the disintegration of public services. In fact, the demoralisation of the people and the workers; the undermining of the Will-to-Win. This attack on morale which, as I have said, is complementary to any phase of bombing, is relentlessly pursued, and has been, to my certain knowledge, for the past year. [This takes us back to the time of Coventry and Mannheim] I mention this because, for a long time, the Government for excellent reasons has preferred the world to think that we still held some scruples and attacked only what the humanitarians are pleased to call Military Targets. But what is a military target? Did not Hitler teach the world long ago that in total war there is no distinction between combatant and non-combatant, church and arsenal. I can assure you, Gentlemen, that we tolerate no scruples – where the Nazis pointed the way, we lead. Our civilian population has suffered every monstrous thing the enemy can do, and you can take it from me that there is no false sentiment in Bomber Command. Everything which they have suffered is given back to the enemy, and with interest.”²⁵²

This final line certainly calls to mind Churchill’s remark about meting out more than the measure of what the Luftwaffe had done to British cities and demonstrates the intended scope and weight of the bombing campaign. Area bombing was, decidedly, being brought into play.

Press responses

Keith Williams describes the Spanish Civil War as the “first fully modern media conflict”.²⁵³

According to Caroline Brothers, it laid down a challenge to media outlets covering future wars.

The low level of censorship coupled with the availability of a range of ground-breaking photographs and the widespread popularity of newsreels allowed for a more holistic approach to reporting war than had previously been possible.²⁵⁴ How the media responded to this challenge, which was intensified by much tighter censorial controls and a greatly increased

²⁵² RAFM: AC71/13/61-62. ‘Speech by Richard Peirse to Thirty Club Luncheon’, 25th November 1941.

²⁵³ Keith Williams, *British Writers and the Media, 1930-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 3.

²⁵⁴ Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1997), 201. See also Michael Griffin, ‘Media Images of War’ in *Media, War & Conflict*, 3, no 2 (2010), 7-41.

area of warfare, would have a direct impact on how the public formed their opinions on the course and the conduct of the war.

The Ministry of Information (Moi) was formed almost immediately after Britain's declaration of war. The name, in contrast with its more sinister sounding German counterpart, the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, highlighted the British "squeamishness about the business of propaganda".²⁵⁵ Not until July 1941 and the appointment of Brendan Bracken as Minister of Information did the body gain stability, or "find its feet".²⁵⁶ In the two preceding years it functioned in a chaotic fashion and drew criticism from the National Union of Journalists which claimed that the public were not getting accurate news about the war.²⁵⁷ In the first half of 1940 the RAF Press Corps had protested "the decision to replace independent newsgathering with official communiqués".²⁵⁸ The raid on Mannheim, in December 1940, must be seen through this fog. The work of the Moi was primarily concerned with censorship. Since most media outlets, at least at the start of the war, got their information from either the Press Association or Reuters and that both were based in the same London office, censorship could be more easily applied by the Moi.²⁵⁹ Beyond this, censorship was officially a voluntary process. If an editor was unsure about whether they could print a certain story or editorial, these could be sent to the censors for approval or rejection.

²⁵⁵ Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 75.

²⁵⁶ Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 80; Miles Hudson and John Stanier, *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), 61-63.

²⁵⁷ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 61-63.

²⁵⁸ Sian Nicholas, 'War Report (BBC 1944-5), and the Birth of the BBC War Correspondent' in Mark Connelly and David Welch, *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 143.

²⁵⁹ Kevin Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day!: A History of Mass Communication in Britain* (London: Hodder Arnold, 1998), 139.

Prosecution was possible for printing stories which could, for example, aid the enemy, and censorial approval was a complete defence.²⁶⁰

In the opening phases of the bombing campaigns, both Allied and Axis, Michael Balfour argues that the propaganda battle centred on which side had made the first forays into bombing of civilians. This issue was clouded by incidents of wildly inaccurate attacks: non-military targets mistakenly hit in what were supposed to be precision raids. In September 1940 for example a hospital in Bielefeld was hit by British bombs, while German bombs intended for military targets in August landed in central London.²⁶¹

A bigger issue for the media to wrestle with was the quantity and quality of information coming back from the armed services. On neither count was it considered adequate, particularly at the start of the war, and Phillip Knightley writes that the British media complained that their news services were poorer than those available to their German counterparts.²⁶² This led, according to John Taylor, to “wide distrust” of the news at a public level, fed by an awareness that censorship prevented a full picture from emerging.²⁶³ Yet Kevin Williams argues that many people were unaware of the “total control” the government exercised over the output of the media.²⁶⁴ In the early days of the bombing campaign there was, according to Ian McLaine, a “delicate path” to be trodden; one which at once showed that German civilians were suffering like those in bombed areas of Britain but also that Bomber Command’s intentions remained strategic. McLaine quotes a note sent to Regional Information Officers in early February 1941 which demonstrates the image being produced. It

²⁶⁰ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 63.

²⁶¹ Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 200-201.

²⁶² Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London: André Deutsch, 2003), 241-242. See also Knapp, ‘The Allied Bombing Offensive’, 42. This situation shifted as the war progressed. See, for example, Jean Seaton, *Carnage and the Media* (London: Penguin, 2005), 261.

²⁶³ John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), 64.

²⁶⁴ Williams, *Get Me a Murder*, 130.

highlights the utility of continuing to target military installations before noting that civilians will have suffered as a by-product of this policy. "Some of the targets which we have attacked are, in fact, situated in thickly populated towns and districts . . . and, consequently, the enemy civilian population has by no means gone unscathed."²⁶⁵ The message was clear: Britain was still targeting military installations, but British civilians were not alone experiencing aerial bombardment.

Before considering the press responses to the Mannheim raid itself it is important to assess both some key articles which reported on the Coventry attacks and articles which raised the question of reprisal attacks on German cities. The *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* both printed articles in the aftermath of the Coventry attacks reporting on a public demand for reprisal attacks on Germany. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter this was much exaggerated and not consistent with public opinion across the country according to widespread research by Mass-Observation. Indeed, a report by Mass-Observation the week before Coventry was attacked found a "tendency for the Press and others to exaggerate the mass extent of reprisals feeling."²⁶⁶

The *Daily Express* ran a story under the headline 'A very gallant city'; 'Stricken, but keeps its courage and sanity'. Of particular note though is the line which appears above the headline (it is also the final line of the article): 'It is time now for our deepest, most inspired anger. Coventry cries: Bomb back and bomb hard'. Yet there is nothing in the article itself to support this line. The writer, Hilde Marchant, had walked among and talked with those affected by the bombing and described the heroism of the civil defence. "There is no means of describing the spirit of these people, or the spirit of the civilians of Coventry. This England, in November 1940, is not helpless." Further she adds, "it is useless to try to find heroes in this city. Every

²⁶⁵ Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 159-160.

²⁶⁶ M-O A: FR 486, 'Sixth Weekly Report for Home Intelligence'. w/e 8th November 1940.

one, from the children to the chief constable and mayor, has been a hero.” Nothing in the article, with the exception of its final line, suggests any kind of widespread call for reprisals on Germany.²⁶⁷ There is a similar if not so polarized story in the *Daily Mail*. On the back page of the Saturday edition is a “Picture tribute to the unnamed heroes of Coventry who, like these citizens turned themselves into fire-fighters to save something of their home.” This is the focus of the main article on the attack.²⁶⁸ Yet an editorial under the headline “Hitting Back – our reply” stated: “The nation calls for the appropriate reply to Goring. SIR CHARLES PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff, is just the man to give it. Our incomparable R.A.F. were pounding Berlin and numerous other objectives while bombs were being showered on Coventry.” Again, however, this suggestion of a nation calling for reprisals isn’t supported by even the newspaper’s own evidence. Indeed, it is hard to square the sentences above with one particular line in the report: “The aftermath of death and suffering has been a wave of warm humanity.” The discussion focuses on civic heroism rather than calls for revenge.²⁶⁹ The *Daily Herald* is a more moderate example: the newspaper condemned the attack on Coventry but made no call for reprisals.²⁷⁰ The articles printed in the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* reported demands by the population of Coventry for reprisal attacks on Germany – demands which at best were much overstated. How reprisal feeling differed through the country at this time will be examined later in this chapter. Mass-Observation reports suggest a far more complex picture.

While there is no duty for media outlets to follow public opinion (rather, for example, than attempting to drive it) it is reasonable to expect newspaper reports purportedly focusing on popular feeling to reproduce this accurately. This failure raised the ire of the editorial team of the Coventry-based *Midland Daily Telegraph*, a fact manifested in an article on 22nd November 1940. The newspaper took issue with a “leading morning national newspaper” which it

²⁶⁷ *Daily Express*, ‘A Very Gallant City’. 16th November 1940, 1, 6.

²⁶⁸ *Daily Mail*, ‘Homes for all in smitten city’. 16th November 1940, 1, 6.

²⁶⁹ *Daily Mail*, ‘Hitting Back’. 16th November 1940, 2.

²⁷⁰ *Daily Herald*, ‘Coventry’. 16th November 1940, 2.

accused of being “gravely concerned as to the attitude of Coventry’s heavily “blitzed” population towards the question of reprisals.” Dismissing the suggestion that the people of Coventry were calling for revenge strikes against Germany, the article goes on to counter-claim that the focus was on “the sheer task of living” rather than striking back. The grievance is with the lack of protection afforded to the city rather than with those carrying out the attack. Arguing though that “morale is sky high”, there is a tone of defiance in the following: “Coventry feels that Hitler has done his worst, and Coventry knows now that it can “take it.”” The people of Coventry are cast as civilian victims of an attack by a foreign air force as opposed to combatants, an important theme in the history of bombing.²⁷¹

As the *Midland Daily Telegraph* grappled with the story of destruction in its home town what is noticeable is the absence of malice from all reports. The tone is one of solidarity rather than anger. This is true in the immediate aftermath and becomes more vehement as time passes. In response to a message vowing that H.M.S. Coventry would “endeavour to repay” the Germans for the attack, the Mayor of Coventry carefully phrased his response. “The city is deeply grateful...and we know H.M.S. Coventry will carry out its work.” There is no endorsement of revenge violence, of the promise to “repay.” The implication instead seems that the mayor thanks the ship’s crew for showing solidarity and for their efforts, but does not expect their focus to be dictated by events in the city. He went on say: “We have had a hard knock but are in good heart and will play our part on land as your brave lads are playing their part at sea.”²⁷² Over the next few days there continues of course to be heavy coverage of the bombing, but these reports remain free of anger or calls for reprisals, even when under a headline alleging German “boasting”.²⁷³

²⁷¹ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, ‘Reprisals’. 22nd November 1940, 4.

²⁷² *Midland Daily Telegraph*, ‘World sympathy with stricken city’. 19th November 1940, 5.

²⁷³ See e.g. *Midland Daily Telegraph*, ‘Coventry’s thanks’. 20th November 1940, 4 and *Midland Daily Telegraph*, ‘Coventry “dead,” boast Germans’. 22nd November 1940, 2.

The story was similar in Southampton after the series of attacks on the city in the final week of November and on 1st December 1940. The campaign for reprisals based, apparently, on local feeling, that the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* had made in the wake of the attacks on Coventry was not followed up after the attacks on Southampton; there was no cause for the editorial team of the Hampshire newspaper the *Southern Daily Echo* to rebut such suggestions. Nor, however, was there any call for reprisals: either in reports of the attacks and on the local reaction or in editorials. As in the *Midland Daily Telegraph* there was a strong emphasis on the spirit of the people in the face of adversity. One headline lamented the savagery of the bombing attack and betrays a sense of anger at the ordeal Southampton had to endure. The reports spoke of the carnage and dislocation brought about by the raids, but always of the presence of the people of Southampton, who had not been laid low by unhappy circumstance. The effect was to show a population whose spirit was unbroken by bombardment. The main report on the front page of the *Southern Daily Echo* after the first attack carried the story of people gathering in “a partly wrecked church” for the Sunday service. “This was characteristic”, wrote the paper, “of the way the townspeople met their ordeal.”²⁷⁴ Four days later the newspaper reported that Southampton, along with Birmingham and Bristol which had also been attacked, was still functioning. “[T]he Germans would be bitterly disappointed if they could walk among the people they tried to terrorise.”²⁷⁵ Signs of defiance were evident, though these were dismissive of the Nazis’ ability to defeat the people of Britain, rather than advocative of retaliatory action. A newsagent sold newspapers under the slogan: “Hitler comes and goes, but we go on for ever.” More dismissive still of the German bombing campaign was a “perky little note” propped against a damaged house. “You can’t win this way, Adolf!” it read.

²⁷⁴ *Southern Daily Echo*, ‘Non-Stop Raid on South-Coast Town’. 23rd November 1940, 1; ‘Germans’ Savage Air Attack on Southampton’. 2nd December 1940, 1.

²⁷⁵ *Southern Daily Echo*, ‘Towns Nazis Tried To Destroy Still Live’. 27th November 1940, 1.

About the town there was, according to the local newspaper, a “spirit of stoical optimism”.²⁷⁶ There was also a prominent focus on the importance of humour in response to the situation. The newspaper painted a series of amusing vignettes in the days following the raids on Southampton: of the fireman who, “begrimed from head to foot after 18 hours’ non-stop duty, picked up a pair of gloves blown into the street by an internal explosion and, pulling them on, commented, “Mustn’t spoil my lilywhite hands!””; of the woman who told a policeman she couldn’t sleep – not because of the bombs but because of the mouse running around on the floor of the church where she and others who had been bombed out were staying.²⁷⁷ In Coventry the *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* reported on the visit of the King to the city. “A shout of defiant laughter went up when a man called to a woman leaning out of a half-wrecked upper room: “Hi! shut that window!” There was, of course, no window to shut.”²⁷⁸ The News Chronicle reported the “staggering normality” with which the people of Coventry carried on.²⁷⁹

These jaunty tales of people carrying on as before, unaffected by the inevitable death and devastation around them, had a clear propaganda value: downplaying the extent to which bombing could break morale both to stoke British stoicism and dampen German celebration. It is important therefore to guard against any assumption that this was the unique stance, or that there was an absence of real hardship under the weight of German bombardment. Juliet Gardiner writes of the tendency in the British press to artificially inflate the spirit of British people; indeed that there was a resentment of “the image of the wisecracking Cockney emerging from the ruins whistling”.²⁸⁰ Angus Calder too has challenged the extent to which the

²⁷⁶ *Southern Daily Echo*, ‘Germans’ Savage Air Attack On Southampton’. 2nd December 1940, 1; *Southern Daily Echo*, ‘Salvage Day in Stricken Southampton’. 3rd December 1940, 1.

²⁷⁷ *Southern Daily Echo*, ‘Worse Than Bombs’. 27th November 1940, 4; *Southern Daily Echo*, ‘Smiles, Too’. 2nd December 1940, 2.

²⁷⁸ *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, ‘Royal Tour Gives New Life to Coventry’. 18th November 1940, 5.

²⁷⁹ *News Chronicle*, ‘Coventry Keeps Brave Pledge To “Go To It” As Usual Today’. 18th November 1940, 6.

²⁸⁰ Gardiner, *The Blitz*, 150-170.

popularly-remembered 'Blitz spirit' existed during the period.²⁸¹ There was anger in Coventry, as expressed by the Mayor, that the city had been bombed through the night without respite from fighter planes or anti-aircraft guns. Yet two key points remain. First, Mass-Observation reported that though panic and the desire to flee was a common response in the immediate aftermath of the raids, this "usually passed within a few days, to be replaced by a re-emergence of stoicism and defiance."²⁸² Second, this initial phase of panic was not, according to the evidence collected by Mass-Observation and supported by local news reports, attached to calls for reprisals on German cities.

The *New Statesman and Nation* immediately struck an anti-reprisals note in the aftermath of the attack on Coventry. 'A London Diary' – a regular feature posted by 'Critic' – argued that "people who have really been bombed do not want a similar misery for others." This is in line with many of the findings of Mass-Observation around this time.²⁸³ In the following issue a reader, Arnold Hyde from Manchester, wrote to criticise this stance. He said he had experienced bombing and argued that not wanting reprisals was contrary to human nature; the thought-process of only an "Oriental Philosopher" or "Inveterate Masochist". Elevating the level of attacks on Germany was necessary, he wrote, to cure "the German nation of its love of militarism". Yet this letter sat alongside one signed by six residents of Coventry disputing the level of reprisal feeling as reported in the *Daily Express*. In full, the letter reads:

"Many citizens of Coventry who have endured the full horror of an intense aerial bombardment would wish to dispute statements made in the *Daily Express* as to the effect that all the people of Coventry expressed the opinion that they wished to bomb, and bomb harder, the peoples of Germany.

This is certainly not the view of *all* or even the majority of the people of Coventry. The general feeling is, we think, that of horror, and a desire that no other peoples shall suffer as they have done. Our impression is that most people feel the hopelessness of

²⁸¹ Calder, *The People's War*, 229.

²⁸² Quoted in Gardiner, *The Blitz*, 170.

²⁸³ *New Statesman and Nation*, 'A London Diary'. 23rd November 1940, 510-511.

bombing the working classes of Germany and very little satisfaction is attained by hearing that Hamburg is suffering in the same way that Coventry has suffered.”²⁸⁴

Hyde’s letter received no support from readers in subsequent editions of the publication, and plenty of criticism. Archibald Robertson suggested Hyde had forgotten lessons of the last war. He did not favour reprisals, nor he said, referring directly to Hyde’s letter, was he either an “Oriental Philosopher” or “Inveterate Masochist”. Fred Hughes, from Walton-on-Thames wrote that his own morale – having been bombed out of home and office – was not comforted by the knowledge of German civilians being attacked. Bombing may be “necessary” and “inevitable” he wrote, “but not for the sake of “reprisals,” in Heaven’s name: We have something better and greater to do than avenge our personal injuries.”²⁸⁵ The following week A. Mercott, of Birmingham, who also challenged Hyde’s opinion, raised the issue of class in relation to reprisal attitudes. The middle classes, this correspondent wrote, “have mostly, owing to the facilities afforded them by their means, escaped.”²⁸⁶

Into the spring as the Blitz continued the newspaper dedicated a full front page article to discussion of reprisals: tellingly under the headline “The Reprisal Folly”. Anger at the German bombing raids on British cities was, according to the article, “natural”, but “ignorant” when it manifested itself as reprisal talk:

“This cry is taken up by the less scrupulous kind of journalist and the less responsible type of politician. It is not the view held by statesmen, nor by experts, by the Staff or by most of the men who are asked to do the bombing. The R.A.F. would agree that bombing civilians could not end the war anyway.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ *New Statesman and Nation*, ‘Reprisals’. 30th November 1940, 540-541.

²⁸⁵ *New Statesman and Nation*, ‘Reprisals’. 7th December 1940, 566.

²⁸⁶ *New Statesman and Nation*, ‘Reprisals’. 14th December 1940, 621.

²⁸⁷ *New Statesman and Nation*, ‘The Reprisal Folly’. 26th April 1940, 425.

Rather than clamour for such action, which the article suggested had largely been absent from British policy thus far, British people should show “that we are sanely anxious to end the madness of competitive destruction.”²⁸⁸

Elsewhere in the left wing press there was a lack of engagement with bombing; rather there is a greater tendency to consider the conditions of war as a whole. The *Socialist Standard* typifies this position, lamenting the conduct of war. An article in the November 1940 issue, contemporaneous with the bombing of Coventry and before the attack on Mannheim, considers “the nightmare of the beleaguered city” and the destruction of “the poor man’s home”. Both quotes could refer to the impact of bombing but this is not clear. The magazine used this article as an opportunity to call for the maintenance of support for socialism even in “this blackest hour”.²⁸⁹ In March the following year the magazine’s editors took issue with a description in the *Daily Mail* of fears that Abyssinian tribesmen would have “little regard for the niceties of civilisation”. The response was damning of the major players in World War Two, if not by name. “Niceties is hardly the word we would apply to modern war between “civilised” countries.”²⁹⁰ Again, this could be read as a critical response to the bomber war, but it is not explicit in the text. The *Fabian News*, organ of the Fabian Society, does not address bombing at this time. R. S. W. Pollard used an article in the January 1941 issue to consider how war allows for the possibility of change – similar in vein to the *Socialist Standard*’s call for solidarity with the socialist movement.²⁹¹ However, the same author also wrote to the *Tribune*, another left-wing mouthpiece, with a question specifically about both sides’ conduct in relation to bombing. “Has the war already so deadened our consciences,” he asked, “that we ignore the fact that every bomb dropped by either side may mean individual desolation and tragedy?” This is a rare example at this early stage of the war of publication of a sentiment which seeks

²⁸⁸ *New Statesman and Nation*, ‘The Reprisal Folly’. 26th April 1940, 425.

²⁸⁹ *Socialist Standard*, ‘Reflections in War Time’. November 1940, 168-169.

²⁹⁰ *Socialist Standard*, “‘The Niceties of Civilisation’”. March 1941.

²⁹¹ *Fabian News*, ‘The Machinery of Planning’. January 1941, 3-4.

to undermine the validity of bombing as a policy. Yet the letter went on to call for an immediate end to hostilities, and this undermined the possibility for a valuable discussion of the policy of aerial bombardment. It was the call for peace which was met with a stern rebuke by the editors, taking attention away from the criticism of bombing.²⁹²

The details and appraisals of the raid on Mannheim vary from publication to publication as is to be expected. None condemn the raid or, standing alone, indicate that this was a considerable departure from other previous bombing raids. A wide-ranging study of newspaper reportage in the weeks following the raid however begins to reveal piece by piece a picture of something out of the ordinary. In *the Times* the initial reports do not reveal anything of note – they quote almost exclusively from the Air Ministry communiqués and the AMNS. The pilot's quotation is not included. The *Manchester Guardian* report from the first day quotes only from the AMNS. As well as the pilot's observation quoted above, another surprise inclusion in this report is the observation that the fires in Mannheim were "of unusual intensity." The headline in the *Manchester Guardian* is perhaps the only editorial indicator of the scale of the attack: "7-hour raid on Mannheim". In both *the Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* there is a concession to the German reports on the events. These noted that a hospital and a castle were hit in the attacks.²⁹³ In *the Scotsman* the population of the city is given – 247,000. This is perhaps a hint towards the possibility of civilian casualties – absent in other newspapers – although it is not added to in the body of the article. The report does mention the "great havoc" caused by the raids.²⁹⁴

The first report from the *Daily Express* is the one mentioned above in relation to the pilot's comment. The Mannheim attack is not deemed worthy of an article in itself and indeed is not

²⁹² *Tribune*, 'Pacifist Questions'. 20th December 1940, 22.

²⁹³ *The Times*, 'R.A.F. attack on Mannheim'. 18th December 1940, 3; *The Times*, 'R.A.F. again bomb Mannheim'. 19th December 1940, 4; *Manchester Guardian*, '7-hour raid on Mannheim'. 18th December 1940, 5; *Manchester Guardian*, 'Official War Reports'. 18th December 1940, 7.

²⁹⁴ *The Scotsman*, 'All night bombing of Mannheim'. 18th December 1940, 7.

the main raid discussed: the headline and first portion of the report concern a raid on Bordeaux. The *Daily Mirror* leads similarly with Bordeaux in a tiny article at the bottom of page 12. Their passage on Mannheim could almost have been included only to fill a final sentence: “Meanwhile, other R.A.F. bombers were blitzing Mannheim.” The following day the article is again short, but this time appears on page 3. And here the results of the raid begin to become apparent. The article describes the bombers returning to Mannheim to find that “some of the fires started in the raid the night before were still burning.” Then, bluntly, the report continues: “They started some more.”²⁹⁵

On 19th December several papers carried an annotated aerial photograph taken by No. 115 Squadron of the RAF during the raids.²⁹⁶ It was the *Daily Express* that gave the image greater contextual significance and again calls into question the effectiveness of the order to keep reports of Mannheim in line with other attacks. Under the headline “This picture breaks a speed record”, the Air Reporter notes: “No official picture of this kind has ever been issued more rapidly by any of the fighting services.” A week earlier the newspaper had made a request to the Air Ministry to make aerial photographs of raids available. “The appeal is having results.”²⁹⁷

In the forthcoming days and weeks Mannheim remained in the news. On the front page of the *Daily Express* on 28th December came a translation of a German radio broadcast on the severity of the raid. “We freely admit that this was the most severe raid made on German territory so far.” Playing down the effect on industrial output, the report focused instead on

²⁹⁵ *Daily Express*, ‘Buildings ‘lifted into the air’ at U-boat base’. 18th December 1940, 5; *Daily Mirror*, ‘R.A.F. bombs lift buildings’. 18th December 1940, 12; *Daily Mirror*, ‘Mannheim hit again by R.A.F.’ 19th December 1940, 3.

²⁹⁶ The image appears in several newspapers, including: *The Times*, ‘Mannheim during a raid by the R.A.F.’ 19th December 1940, 6, *The Scotsman*, ‘The R.A.F. raid on Mannheim’. 19th December 1940, 5 and *The Illustrated London News*, ‘The R.A.F. hammer targets far apart: Mannheim and Eritrea’. 28th December 1940, 823.

²⁹⁷ *Daily Express*, ‘This picture breaks a speed record’. 19th December 1940, 6.

“the destruction of Mannheim Castle...and the residential districts.” There also came the claim: “British pilots have shown their callousness by attaching to some of their bombs tags with the inscription ‘Merry Christmas.’”²⁹⁸ Readers’ letters to the editor do not, in those publications surveyed, respond to the Mannheim raid. This may simply indicate that the raid did not register widely with the public; certainly it is not the aim of this paper to show widespread indignation about the Mannheim raid when this was not the case. Helen Reid proposes a different interpretation. She suggests there was a fear that criticising aspects of the war effort would lead to the correspondent being labelled subversive. A respondent to a December 1943 Mass-Observation Directive (which is discussed at length in chapter three) expressly mentions the fear of being imprisoned as a result of speaking out against bombing.²⁹⁹

Perhaps most intriguing are *the Times* and *Manchester Guardian* reports from 3rd January 1941 reporting a large raid on Bremen. Both reports borrow from the AMNS and include the same quotation from a report on the Bremen raid. “Much greater than Mannheim”, is the view of an unnamed source (and is used as a sub-headline in *the Times*). On the face of it this may seem interesting but hardly damning; not likely to interfere with the order for: “No repeat no special publicity to be given to the operation afterwards”. It casts Mannheim as the smaller attack. Yet both newspapers highlight the quotation as a moment of colour in otherwise fact-based reports. The *Manchester Guardian* sets the quotation against the observation that such reports “are usually couched in the most unemotional language,” while *the Times* notes that it sits beneath “many dry particulars”. There is no explanation in either article of what happened in Mannheim, or where it happened: it is simply left as a place name. This is of greatest significance here. Mannheim has been set up as a reference point. The attack is set apart from the list of towns and cities already attacked during the war. In the days after the raid the

²⁹⁸ *Daily Express*, ‘Germans admit ‘severest R.A.F. raid so far’’. 28th December 1940, 1.

²⁹⁹ Helen Reid, *Bristol Blitz: The Untold Story* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 1988), 8; M-O A: DR 1200, reply to December 1943 Directive. On the fear of writing letters of protest for publication, see also Richard Overy, ‘Pacifism and the Blitz, 1940-1941’ in *Past and Present*, 219, no. 1 (2013), 207-208.

Manchester Guardian had printed an article by their Air Correspondent highlighting the scope of the bombing campaign. "A mere recital of the places bombed by Royal Air Force aircraft during the week would show the great and constantly expanding scope of this arm". In a growing campaign both newspapers felt able to reference Mannheim without any further background.³⁰⁰

An article in the *International Labour Review* considered 'Economic Organisation for Total War' and wrote presciently on the new technology employed by the belligerent powers. "Aeroplanes immensely superior to those used in the war of 1914-18 are playing a leading part and will probably in the end play a decisive part in the present war." This prediction came in passing however, and did not detail how the role of the aeroplane would play out. The focus moved by the end of the article to the threat posed by the war to social ideals.³⁰¹

Whether due to the strictures of censorship or because the raid on Mannheim did not arouse any great suspicion, there is no outright criticism in any of the newspapers surveyed here. For the most part the extracts discussed here are likely to have aroused concern only for particularly perceptive readers at the time, and it is mainly with hindsight that the reports can be seen to raise issues for discussion. Yet the trends remain important as contemporary sources. They will later be compared with the journalistic response to the attacks on Hamburg and Dresden, and they begin this story of the relationship of the media with the bombing campaign during World War Two.

³⁰⁰ *The Times*, '20,000 incendiaries on Bremen'. 3rd January 1941, 4; *Manchester Guardian*, 'Glow seen 120 miles away'. 3rd January 1941, 5. *Manchester Guardian*, 'Libya and Greece'. 22nd December 1940, 6.

³⁰¹ *International Labour Review*, 'Economic organisation for total war: with special reference to the workers'. October-November 1940, 175-214.

Public responses

Mass-Observation prepared a series of weekly reports for Home Intelligence. The question of reprisals was of significant interest in these. A week after the attack on Coventry the report found “the demand for reprisals in decline, and certainly in Coventry it was slight as compared with the press versions of opinion there.”³⁰² For the following report observers in London sought to obtain how widespread the call for reprisals was in London. Two different questions were used: the results from the first question having been considered compromised by the investigators’ concern that people did not fully understand what the word ‘reprisals’ meant. For some, it seemed to refer to any bombing action against Germany, rather than specifically seeking to strike back in the manner of the Coventry attack. Thus, when asking simply: “Are you for or against reprisals?” 51% stated that they were; 32% that they were not; and 17% had no opinion. Even based on these results, the idea of widespread calls for reprisals – as claimed by some sections of the media – seems not to be on stable ground. But with a more subtly worded question, the results were even less clear cut. Following the wording of a poll by BIPO, observers asked: “In the view of the indiscriminate [sic] German bombing of this country would you approve or disapprove if the R.A.F. adopted a similar policy of bombing the civilian population of Germany?” Even this wording was not deemed entirely satisfactory by Mass-Observation, with some respondents unclear on the meaning of indiscriminate (believing it to mean accidental) and others not agreeing that the German policy was, in fact, indiscriminate. Nevertheless, this time those who would approve numbered 47%, slightly down on the number who said they were in favour of reprisals. What is more striking is that the section of those interviewed who had no opinion drops by over half to 8%, with 45% disapproving of the suggestion. Overall, this leaves those approving of “a similar policy” in a slight minority. The report later states that “many” of those responding to the survey were now indicating pros

³⁰² M-O A: FR 501, ‘Eighth Weekly Report for Home Intelligence’. w/e 22nd November 1940.

and cons of such a policy: “which they did not do to any marked degree a couple of months ago.”³⁰³ The BIPO surveys through the course of the Blitz add valuable further data. In October 1940 the nightly bombing of British cities was well underway: this was as yet though before the attack on Coventry and the response on Mannheim. When asking the same question as used above by Mass-Observation, 46% of those surveyed stated that they would approve of the RAF bombing the civilian population of Germany, the same percentage as those who would disapprove.³⁰⁴ In November those surveyed were asked about “the most important war problem the British Government must solve this winter.” Concerns focused most heavily on securing the Home Front. Finding a salve to the problem of night bombing was the problem most respondents gave (12%) while the third-most highly placed answer was the issue of night shelters (12%). The bombing of Germany was twenty-third on the list – out of thirty – with less than one per cent of those surveyed considering it the most important problem.³⁰⁵

The evidence offered by Mass-Observation shows a mix of public opinions on how to respond to attacks on Britain; certainly among some people surveyed there *was* a desire for attacks on German cities. In January 1941 nearly 23% of people surveyed said that their first thoughts after hearing of a very heavy air-raid (the answers clearly show that the question implies a raid on a British town or city) was to “[b]omb German civilians in retaliation”. This desire was, however, slightly subordinate to the hope that there would be an intensification of attacks on German *military* targets; both of these responses scored lower than the answer “Wonder how the bombed people are getting on”.³⁰⁶ The question of whether the R.A.F. should adopt a policy of bombing the German civilian population drew a more supportive response in April 1941 as compared to the previous October: 54% now said they would approve of such a policy with 37% saying they would disapprove. Yet this is far from the “overwhelming majority”

³⁰³ M-O A: FR 508, ‘The Ninth Weekly Report for Home Intelligence’. w/e 29th November 1940.

³⁰⁴ British Institute of Public Opinion (hereafter BIPO): Survey #72, October 1940.

³⁰⁵ BIPO: Survey #73, November 1940.

³⁰⁶ BIPO: Survey #74, January 1941.

Churchill spoke of in his speech in July. Many of those who would support such a policy added a comment which spoke of retribution and reprisal: giving the Germans “a taste of it”; “an eye for an eye.” There are also however a range of comments to support those disapproving of bombing German civilians. These range from the procedural – keeping to military objectives for greatest effectiveness – to the moral – killing women and children was on a par with Hitler and we should “keep our hands clean”.³⁰⁷

In the wider context of the war as a whole the bombing of Germany remained a very low-level priority for the British people surveyed by BIPO. In March the organisation repeated the question from November about the most important war problem to be solved by the British Government – this time during the spring. Again “Bombing Germany” scored less than one per cent, with the highest scorers – “Submarine warfare and shipping losses” and “Maintaining sufficient food supplies” – both scoring comfortably over 20%. A key point to raise here is that while BIPO recorded several different answers to the question, this did not dilute the results to an extent which would render them nearly meaningless. The answers scoring above 20% suggest a kind of consensus on some matters; still other answers scored far more highly than the bombing of Germany.³⁰⁸

The BIPO finding which most powerfully undermines Churchill’s original assertion comes from the survey of June 1941, just a month before he gave his speech. To reiterate, Churchill had spoken of a hypothetical convention between Britain and Germany to “stop the bombing of all cities”. There would be little support for this, he had suggested. Churchill hypothesised that if asked to vote on such a convention, the “overwhelming majority” of the people of London would respond: “No. We will mete out to the Germans the measure, and more than the measure that they have meted out to us.” BIPO had asked almost exactly this question:

³⁰⁷ BIPO: Survey #77, April 1941.

³⁰⁸ BIPO: Survey #76, March 1941.

“Would you approve or disapprove of an agreement between England and Germany to stop night bombing?” There was in fact a majority who were in support of the proposal, as Churchill had suggested. This majority, however, was only slight. 46% replied that they would approve; 43% replied that they would not. 11% stated that they did not know. This shows far less consensus on the issue of aerial bombardment, and suggests a population considerably less fixed in their ideas about the conduct of war.³⁰⁹

Another myth which could be challenged by Mass-Observation was that which suggested calls for reprisals rose in areas of the UK which had received heavy attacks. A report from Coventry in the days following the attack found evidence of “vague futility” but “very little feeling in favour of reprisals.”³¹⁰ Leicester, 25 miles north-east of Coventry, was bombed heavily on 19th November 1940, just days after the major attack on its neighbouring city. A file report describes how a clamour for reprisals for Coventry disappeared once Leicester had suffered under bombardment: “Before their own raid, the people of Leicester...were very belligerent, demanding reprisals. But since the raid this has dropped entirely; investigator heard no mention of any demand for violent action.”³¹¹ This trend was noticed around the country. In December in Southampton, “[t]here was very little reprisal talk, and even when investigator asked people whether they wanted reprisals, the usual answer was “What good would that do?”” The observers noted that anger, where it was expressed, was directed towards German bombers rather than German civilians.³¹² Here there is a strong echo of the diary of Colin Perry, a teenager who recorded his experience of war. After seeing bomb damage near to his home in South London he records his wish to become a fighter pilot to shoot down the aeroplanes sent to attack Britain. He is specific here: he does not want to be associated with attempts to bomb Germany in revenge. “I will not be a member of a bomber crew – never! If I

³⁰⁹ BIPO: Survey #78, June 1941.

³¹⁰ M-O A: FR 495, ‘Coventry’. 18th November 1940.

³¹¹ M-O A: FR 503, ‘Air Raid on Leicester’. 26th November 1940.

³¹² M-O A: FRs 516 & 517, ‘Southampton’. 4th December 1940.

thought for one moment I was a cog in bringing about such terrible tragedy I would rather be shot.”³¹³

Further reports from cities around the country found the same thing: in the aftermath of bombing there was no particular call for reprisals from the bombed civilians. The research was wide-ranging, taking in up to the end of January 1941, along with those cities already mentioned, Liverpool, Manchester,³¹⁴ Bristol, Cheltenham,³¹⁵ Portsmouth and Plymouth.³¹⁶ Aside from the lack of “reprisal feeling” noted in these areas, observers were able to start noting some variations according to gender, class and proximity to the raids. According to a report for Home Intelligence, “women showed more violent feelings than men.”³¹⁷ The issue of class and proximity to the raids can be tied together: as at least one report noted, those interviewed who were described as middle or upper class tended to live away from the urban centres which received the heaviest bombing. Mass Observers showed how working class people often bore the brunt of aerial bombardment and yet were less likely to favour reprisals.³¹⁸ In villages close to Southampton which had not experienced any bombing whatsoever, observers reported “violent reprisals reactions”; versus “no expressed demand for reprisals” in the city itself.³¹⁹ A report collating information from several areas advised that feelings in favour of reprisal bombing was “strongest in places which have never been bombed at all and among people with reasonable incomes”.³²⁰ In an article written in April 1941 Tom Harrisson echoes the sentiment of the file reports used here. He argues that having spent time in Coventry in the aftermath of the bombing he “heard no demand for reprisals there.”

³¹³ Colin Perry, *Boy in the Blitz: The 1940 Diary of Colin Perry* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 205-206.

³¹⁴ M-O A: FR 538, ‘Liverpool and Manchester’. December 1940.

³¹⁵ M-O A: FR 529, ‘The Aftermath of Town Blitzes’. 19th December 1940.

³¹⁶ M-O A: FR 559, ‘Portsmouth and Plymouth’. 29th January 1941.

³¹⁷ M-O A: FR 508, as above.

³¹⁸ M-O A: FR 526, ‘Conference on Federal Union Oxford’. 13th December 1940, See also M-O A: FRs 538, 516 and 559, as above.

³¹⁹ M-O A: FR 516, as above.

³²⁰ M-O A: FR 526, as above.

Further, Harrison described how the proportion of people in favour of reprisals rose steeply in areas that had received the least amount of bombs, while in London, where most bombs fell, there was a slim majority who were against bombing German civilians. This was enough for Harrison to write: “it is exactly wrong to state...that the blitz-towns rise up as one man and scream for reprisals.” Harrison himself was not pushing a humanitarian agenda: he states that he is not against the bombing of German civilians *per se*, but would only support it if to do so was “*in the best interests of winning the war and the peace.*”³²¹

The overall trend seems to show that direct experience of being bombed, and having fewer means to deal with the consequences, correlated with less of a push for similar treatment to be returned to Germany. Empathy with fellow civilians seems to be evident here, rather than a desire for others to suffer in the same manner. What should be made very clear is that at this stage of the war Mass Observers had to seek out and ask for opinions on reprisals. This is mirrored in the majority of the diaries kept at this time. The focus of the diarists is largely on their daily life and, when they come under bombardment, on how to adapt. Later in the war diarists start making clearer comments about the Allied bombing campaign, but this is not the case to any notable degree in late 1940 and early 1941.

Conclusion

What is unarguable in the light of what Mass-Observation and BIPO surveys show is that the national newspapers which reported the public calls for reprisals – and later Churchill’s speech – were well out of step with public opinion. The overall impression is that there was no widespread call for reprisals in the wake of the attacks on Coventry and other bombed British cities. On a day to day basis the focus of most members of the public was on attempting to restore a semblance of normality to their homes. Quite apart from this, as Harrison

³²¹ *The Cambridge Review*, ‘A public demand for reprisals?’ 30th May 1941, 454-456.

anonymously (and quite pointedly) told the BBC European News Service: "They buried two hundred dead in Coventry yesterday, in a common grave. The whole town mourned for these dead, most of them women and children, all of them civilians and citizens. They did not shout about reprisals."³²² When Mannheim was bombed four weeks after Coventry, it was neither driven by nor supported by popular opinion. The following chapters in this thesis will show how British people responded to a massively expanding area bombing campaign as the war progressed, through the devastation of Hamburg and Dresden. The early experiments with area bombing during the war – which paved the way for the far heavier raids to come – were not subject to the widespread approval that Churchill and some sections of the press spoke of. Throughout the Second World War there existed a voice of dissent against this particular aspect of Allied war conduct: a voice rooted in Britain's own experience under aerial bombardment.

³²² M-O A: FR497. 'Coventry'. 21st November 1940.

Chapter 3 – A turning point? 1943 and the bombing of Hamburg

After the attack on Mannheim the Blitz continued for a further five months. In early summer 1941 German forces had occupied much of continental Europe and they remained in the ascendancy. Yet by the summer months of 1943 the global picture looked very different. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drew the United States into the war and German resources were thinned by the decision to declare war on the Soviet Union. Coincidentally the plans for Operation Barbarossa were drawn up in their initial phases in the week following the RAF raid on Mannheim in December 1940.³²³ The invasion of the USSR got underway six months later. The failure of the attempt to quickly and decisively defeat the Soviet Union via the *Blitzkrieg* strategy gave way to a lengthier conflict on the Eastern Front. This signalled the start of what would ultimately prove to be a significant turning point in the war. By February 1943 the Soviet Union had gained a victory at Stalingrad; one which irrevocably damaged Hitler's ambitions on the Eastern Front. This, along with the earlier Allied victory in the Second Battle of El Alamein, represented a decisive shift in fortunes.³²⁴ "Black May" saw major U-boat losses and a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic, and July and August brought another round of setbacks for the Axis powers. The Battle of Kursk represented another major victory for the Red Army. Winston Churchill later described the significance of this battle: "Stalingrad was the end of the beginning, but the Battle of Kursk was the beginning of the end."³²⁵ While the Wehrmacht and the Red Army were locked in battle on the Eastern Front, the Allies secured a foothold in Italy with the successful invasion of Sicily. On 25th July Benito Mussolini was removed as Italian leader. Against this background of growing Allied strength came a devastating series of attacks on the northern city of Hamburg at the end

³²³ Richard Overy, *The Third Reich: A Chronicle* (London: Quercus, 2011), 259.

³²⁴ Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (London: Penguin, 2007); Stephen Bungay, *Alamein* (London: Aurum Press, 2003).

³²⁵ Quoted in Lloyd Clark, *Kursk: The Greatest Tank Battle, Eastern Front 1943* (London: Headline, 2011).

of July and the beginning of August. The resultant firestorm was a significant factor in swelling the death toll to over 42,600 people. Intense, wide-ranging fires rapidly sucked in air and created a self-sustaining wind system. This led to an approximation of hurricane conditions in the city.³²⁶ The 'Battle of Hamburg' was a one-sided affair, amounting to one of the most deadly series of raids on Germany during the whole of the war.³²⁷

With Luftwaffe bombing of Britain now greatly reduced and major raids on Germany an established part of Allied strategy, the outlook for British people was very different to how it had been in the face of nightly attacks and rapid German expansion in 1940 and 1941. This chapter will examine how the bombing of Germany was viewed under these new conditions of war. The response of the campaign group the Bombing Restriction Committee will be discussed in detail. It is also important to consider here the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. This chapter will show that the Archbishop's conservative reaction to protest about the bombing campaign had the effect of blocking voices of concern in the middle years of the war.

As discussed in the introduction, Mark Connelly has argued that public controversy surrounding the bombing of Germany developed and grew after the end of the war, and that public opinion "remained firmly in favour" of the bomber campaign while it was being carried out. Further, he challenges theses such as that of Stephen A. Garrett for taking the views of a small group of public figures and using them to draw conclusions about the wider British public.³²⁸ Connelly proposes that Bishop George Bell, Vera Brittain and others formed a

³²⁶ The science behind the creation of firestorms has been described in Musgrove, G. *Operation Gomorrah: The Hamburg Firestorm Raids* (London: Jane's, 1981), 102-116. Keith Lowe also offers a detailed description of the phenomenon. See Keith Lowe, *Inferno: The Devastation of Hamburg, 1943* (London: Penguin, 2007), 200-202.

³²⁷ See for example Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 81-87; Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 234-242; Martin Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg: The Firestorm Raid* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), Lowe, *Inferno*, 174, 200-232, 287-299.

³²⁸ Connelly, 'The British People', 39-40; Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*.

minority viewpoint and were not in line with the British public. I hope to use this chapter to explore the nature and extent of this viewpoint in the mid-point of the war, and to show that a proportion of the public did not support the manner of the bomber campaign, yet nor were their views expressed in a public forum. Those who were more vocal in their protest would find that their voices of dissent were in effect muted by a lack of support from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Bell's anti-bombing stance is widely known; here therefore the purpose is to offer a greater weight of consideration to Temple's role at the time.

Mannheim to Hamburg

The Allied bomber offensive had grown hugely to bring the realities of conflict to the German people. After the experiment with area bombing that was carried out against Mannheim there were a number of other similar attacks in 1941. Two documents produced that summer would hasten the move towards an official area bombing campaign. On the basis that limited visibility above target areas would not allow for precision bombing around 75% of the time, a directive was sent to Bomber Command on 9th July requiring 75% of capacity to be focused on sustained bombing of "working class and industrial areas".³²⁹ The following month the Butt Report confirmed fears that British bomber crews were not successfully striking their targets with anywhere near a satisfactory degree of reliability. Analysis of aerial photographs showed, in short, the paradoxical *imprecision* of *precision* bombing. Crews were unable with any certainty to hit their intended targets. Only a third of bomber aircraft surveyed during June and July 1941 dropped their bombs within 5 miles of their target. Two years before Hamburg – the

³²⁹ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 263-264.

“high tide” in the bomber war – Bomber Command was, in Hastings’ words, at its “low-water mark”.³³⁰

The findings of the Butt Report brought area bombing – as a fully adopted policy – closer to reality. On 14th February 1942 General Directive Number 5 was presented to Bomber Command and made official a policy of area bombing in all but name. The document required the aim of Bomber Command’s work to be: “to focus attacks on the morale of the enemy civil population, and, in particular, of the industrial workers.” The growing confidence in Bomber Command capacity is reflected in the following: “You are authorised to employ your forces without restriction.” Shortly afterwards Bomber Command was brought under the control of a new Commander-in-Chief, Arthur Harris, and now had both the ambition and the capability to regularly carry out devastating attacks across Germany.³³¹

At the end of the following month Lord Cherwell, the government scientific advisor who requested the Butt Report, used its findings to lobby for a policy of ‘dehousing’: seeking to destroy houses as a means to breaking German civilian resistance. He directly called for this approach, arguing: “Investigation seems to show that having one’s house demolished is most damaging to morale. People seem to mind it more than having their friends or even relatives killed.” An estimate based on damage caused during the Blitz and current bomber production suggested one-third of the German population could be made homeless by targeting built-up areas. The Cherwell paper elicited much debate. This debate though, as Ronald Clark writes, was on “strategic and not humanitarian grounds”. Chief among Cherwell’s opponents was the scientist Sir Henry Tizard, yet the former’s influence held greater sway with Churchill, Sinclair

³³⁰ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 146; Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 127-129; Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 57-58.

³³¹ Longmate, *The Bombers*, 210-211.

and Portal.³³² As the official historians write, Cherwell's paper gave the air offensive its "design and theme". Civilians were now under direct attack.³³³

On 28th March Bomber Command raised what was then the highest German death toll in a single attack with a heavy raid on the port city of Lübeck. Lübeck was not a modern city and contained a large number of wooden houses. Harris was keen for his crews to experience success, and this raid offered a prime opportunity to get it.³³⁴ Operationally the raid was a went well. A number of military targets were destroyed, along with over 15,000 homes. 312 civilians were killed.³³⁵ This was the primary motivating factor for the 'Baedeker' raids by the Luftwaffe on the English cities of Exeter, Bath, Norwich and York.³³⁶ At the end of May the first 'Thousand bomber raid' was carried out on Cologne. It was intended by Harris not only to cause massive destruction but also to be a daunting display of British air power. Incidentally, but for poor weather conditions, Hamburg would have been the target of this attack.³³⁷

The fleet dispatched was well over twice the average size of that which Bomber Command could muster during the spring of that year. The attack was considered "an amazing success."³³⁸ Yet as Grayling points out, the Thousand Bomber Raids (two further such missions were run – one to Essen on 1st June and another to Bremen on 25th June – with neither achieving the levels of destruction caused in Cologne) ultimately proved to have been a greater propaganda success than actual military successes. Even in Cologne, where the

³³² Ronald W. Clark, *Tizard* (London: Methuen, 1965), 305. On the debate over the Cherwell paper see also Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 331-336; Mosley, *London Under Fire*, 288-292.

³³³ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 336; Richard Overy, 'The Weak Link? The Perception of the German Working Class by RAF Bomber Command, 1940-1945' in *Labour History Review*, 77, no. 1 (2012), 11.

³³⁴ Similar rationale lay behind the decision to target Rostock nearly a month later.

³³⁵ Longmate, *The Bombers*, 213-214.

³³⁶ Named after the German tourist guides to England, the attacks were carried out on cities of historical importance initially in response to the attack on Lübeck.

³³⁷ Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 119-123; Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 83.

³³⁸ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 402-403, 407. See also Arthur Travers Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London: Collins, 1947), 108-9.

greatest damage was done, the number of civilian deaths – 486 – was lower than the death toll that would be inflicted on several cities Germany by the following summer. In spite of the huge number of planes dispatched and the high proportion of these which reported hitting their target, the defences were still able to function. Nevertheless, Harris thought it worth persevering with as a model for future Bomber Command operations.³³⁹

The attack on Cologne provoked a second Baedeker phase, with three raids on Canterbury spread over the course of week: the first on the night immediately after the first Thousand Bomber raid. Taken together the Baedeker raids were not hugely successful for the Luftwaffe. Though over 1,600 people were killed in the British cities targeted, the potential capabilities of both air forces, as evidenced by the contemporaneous Baedeker raids and the Thousand Bomber raids, appeared starkly different. Attacks on Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth and Ipswich were all smaller than the main Baedeker raids.³⁴⁰

By the start of 1943 the war had been going on for more than three years. The war on the eastern front had been going on for nearly half of that time and the first anniversary of American involvement had just passed. From 14th to 24th January 1943 Western Allied leaders met at the Casablanca Conference to agree on strategy for the next phase of the war. In terms of the war in the air, an important result of the conference was the Casablanca directive which outlined the intended combined bombing policy of the United States and Britain. Agreed at the conference and issued on 4th February by the Air Ministry, the directive required that targets of military and industrial importance were a priority of bombing campaigns, but maintained morale as an equally important factor. Bomber Command and the United States Army Air Forces should seek: “The progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic systems and the undermining of the morale of the German people to

³³⁹ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 263, Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 408, 412-3.

³⁴⁰ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 118-119, 189; Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 52.

a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.”³⁴¹ According to Overy, Harris did not read this “as anything more than a statement of intent.”³⁴² Now with a more powerful force of aircraft at its disposal, Bomber Command would still pursue the aims of General Directive Number 5 into the spring and summer of 1943. After Allied success in the Battle of the Ruhr during the spring – which saw sustained targeting of industrial targets – attention turned to Hamburg at the end of July.

Historiography

Two books published in the early part of the 1980s took the 1943 attacks on Hamburg as their subject. In 1981 Gordon Musgrove, a former Bomber Command navigator, wrote *Operation Gomorrah: The Hamburg Firestorm Raids*. A more thorough study of the attacks is *The Battle of Hamburg* by Martin Middlebrook, published in 1984.³⁴³ The latter takes in the planning phase, as well as comprehensive details of the attacks themselves and the conditions they caused in the city. While this was a significant addition to scholarship on the area bombing campaign, the author does not pass explicit judgment on the raid, instead leaving the reader to decide based on the wide-ranging testimony included. Middlebrook admitted to the difficulties of reaching a conclusion on whether the bombings could be considered acceptable. “Even after the post-war years of hindsight, and more than two years of personal study, I cannot decide upon a private answer to that question.”³⁴⁴

Twenty years later the controversy over the bombing of Hamburg increased with the publication of two books in particular: *The Fire* by Jörg Friedrich and *Among the Dead Cities* by A. C. Grayling. Both have been mentioned already in other contexts; it is worth here

³⁴¹ Quoted in Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 12-13. See also Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 214-227.

³⁴² Overy, *The Bombing War* 303-307

³⁴³ Musgrove, *Operation Gomorrah*; Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*.

³⁴⁴ Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 353.

considering their relevance to Hamburg. Unlike Middlebrook, the authors were far from reticent as regards casting a judgment. Grayling's book was published in 2006, the first year in which Friedrich's became available in English. Before this *Der Brand* had already gained widespread attention in Germany where it had been serialised in the tabloid newspaper the *Bild*. The book caused controversy by raising the possibility of Churchill being labelled a war criminal. Friedrich was praised for having pried open a discussion of the catastrophic loss caused by the Allied Bomber Offensive, yet his book was also criticised for its apparently deliberately provocative stance: one which took the language of the Holocaust and applied it to German victims of air raids.³⁴⁵ Neo-Nazi factions have drawn succour from the book and appropriated anniversaries of bombing attacks, particularly that of the destruction of Dresden.³⁴⁶

Friedrich did not play down this position, saying in an interview that "Churchill was the greatest child-slaughterer of all time."³⁴⁷ With the rhetoric of war criminality resonating through the pages of the book, some sections in particular made provocative links to images of the Holocaust. For example, Friedrich writes that a large proportion of those killed by fire in Kassel and Hamburg "had been gassed to death in the cellars."³⁴⁸ Elsewhere he describes in detail the fate of those caught up in the firestorm: "the quick, deadly breath with which life was taken from the world."³⁴⁹ Though reaching similar, if less sensational conclusions to Friedrich, Grayling sought to put the cases both for and against area bombing in his book, and

³⁴⁵ Friedrich, *The Fire*; Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*. On the reception of Friedrich's book, see for example: BBC, 'Horrific fire-bombing images published'. 22nd October 2003 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3211690.stm>; accessed 20th September 2014).

³⁴⁶ *Spiegel Online*, 'Blocking the Neo-Nazis: Peaceful March Remembers Dresden Bombing'. 14th February 2013 (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/demonstrators-in-dresden-block-neo-nazi-march-with-human-chain-a-883326.html>; accessed 20th September 2014).

³⁴⁷ *The Guardian*, 'Germany's forgotten victims'. 22nd October 2003 (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/oct/22/worlddispatch.germany>; accessed 20th September 2014).

³⁴⁸ Friedrich, *The Fire*, 331.

³⁴⁹ Friedrich, *The Fire*, 166.

to pass judgment accordingly. He did so at length but also with brevity, summing up his judgment of the area bombing campaign as follows:

In short and in sum: was area bombing wrong? Yes.
Very wrong?: Yes.³⁵⁰

As well as describing the conditions on the ground in the city, Grayling uses the bombing of Hamburg as a critical test. It is his focal point through the book for the reason that the attacks took place at the height of the war when it was, despite what may have been a turning of the tide, “by no means securely won.” With a hint to what his ultimate judgment would be Grayling argued that if the area bombing of Hamburg was unjust, and potentially criminal, then so too must be the attack on Dresden for it took place at a point where the outcome of the war could no longer be seriously doubted.³⁵¹ In 2007 Keith Lowe’s *Inferno: The Devastation of Hamburg, 1943* was published. Lowe uses oral history – along with archival sources – to tell the story of the events from the perspective of those carrying out the attacks as well as people in Hamburg who experienced the bombing. It offers a wide-ranging account of the build-up to the bombings, as well as reflections on the events as they took place and their aftermath. Lowe does however under-represent the extent to which voices of concern or even dissent existed in Britain at the time. Away from the well-known figures of Bishop George Bell and the MP Richard Stokes, he identifies a tone of “pure triumph”, which as this chapter will show, needs to be assessed more carefully.³⁵²

Hamburg does not conjure quite the same level of controversy as Dresden due to the time at which it was bombed, yet the scale of the damage and the high death toll ensure its prime place in the story of aerial bombardment during the Second World War.

³⁵⁰ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 277.

³⁵¹ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 271-272.

³⁵² Lowe, *Inferno*. On the nature of British responses to the attacks, see pp. 337-338.

Operations

The Battle of Hamburg was, in the words of the official historians of the bomber war, “the high tide of Bomber Command’s achievement throughout this arduous campaign. No other town in Germany felt the weight of war in this period as Hamburg did in the last week of July and the first of August.” Hamburg represented the ultimate expression of what had first been tried in Mannheim two and a half years previously. And it was only part of the “path of destruction” Bomber Command planned to forge over the coming months which would lead to Berlin, and it was hoped, to an end to the war.³⁵³

The build-up to, plans for and execution of the Battle of Hamburg have been covered in great detail elsewhere, but it will be useful here to discuss some of the key facts about the attacks. The city was attacked by both British and American aircraft from 24th July to 3rd August 1943. Though fires burned in the city throughout the period the most damaging attack came on the night of 27th/28th July. A firestorm took hold and was a major reason for the death toll of over 18,000 people on that night alone.³⁵⁴ The bomber crews attacking Hamburg used, for the first time in the war, a particular radar countermeasure, the use of which had been placed on hold until that point. Code-named Window, the simple technology comprised bundles of small strips of aluminium foil which, when separated and dropped from a plane at one minute intervals, would effectively replicate the echo of a bomber on enemy radar. The effect was to entirely confuse the radar picture: creating false echoes where no bombers were; a sky full of noise without definition. Luftwaffe night-fighter planes, which were directed to their targets by radar, were sent out but could not provide any guarantee of finding the bombers. As Gordon Musgrove wrote in his history of the Hamburg raids, “[t]here was no lack of targets on

³⁵³ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 146.

³⁵⁴ For sources which cover the details of the attacks in greater detail, see for example Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 93-141, 234-251, and Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 138-167. On the number of casualties, see Overy, *The Bombing War*, 334.

[German radar] and as [the Luftwaffe fighters] closed in for the kill they found themselves flying through clouds of paper reminiscent of a New York ticker-tape celebration.”³⁵⁵ With ground defences and fighters thrown into complete disarray, more Bomber Command planes were able to reach the target and drop their full bomb loads, and only twelve planes out of nearly 800 were lost on the first night of the attack: around 1.5% of the total force.³⁵⁶ Prior to the introduction of Window, Bomber Command losses had been on the increase. By way of comparison, twenty bombers had been lost during a raid on Aachen in mid-July. Less than half as many planes were used in this raid as were sent to Hamburg.³⁵⁷ Air Chiefs were delighted with the resulting low losses. A weekly report on Bomber Command activities contained the satisfied response: “[Window has] forced the German High Command to unstinted lying as to the number of British aircraft brought down by the defences.”³⁵⁸

The simplicity of Window was, in fact the reason why it had been previously held back. There were fears, voiced particularly by the Minister for Home Security, Herbert Morrison, that the Germans would quickly replicate the technology and use it in attacks on Britain, increasing the danger to British civilians. In fact, German researchers had already prepared much the same system. Again, it had been held back for fear of leaking the secret.³⁵⁹ Until Window was dropped during the Hamburg attacks, there was the odd situation of both sides delaying the use of the same tool for fear of the other side copying it. Even in early 1943 the case against the introduction of Window was weakening. Morrison remained concerned about the greater dangers which German use of Window would pose to British civilians. Yet German bomber strength had been massively reduced and could no longer pose the same threat to British cities

³⁵⁵ Musgrove, *Operation Gomorrah*, 29.

³⁵⁶ Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 98, 127-129.

³⁵⁷ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 319; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume 2*, 141.

³⁵⁸ Christ Church Library, Oxford (hereafter CCO), Lord Portal Archive. RAF. Folder 13. ‘Bomber Command Weekly Digest No. 68’, w/e 1.8.43.

³⁵⁹ Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 238.

as it had in 1940 and 1941. Max Hastings argues that even by the autumn of 1942 Luftwaffe bombers posed a “negligible threat” to Britain.³⁶⁰ And British bomber losses were rising – this could be challenged by the use of Window. Morrison eventually relented when the Chief of the Air Staff, Charles Portal, made clear the changed dynamic in the skies. In the summer of 1943 – far removed from 1940 – Window could more confidently be introduced. The introduction of Window was held back until after the invasion of Sicily in order to prevent the possibility of it being used defensively against the landing parties.³⁶¹ Yet the decision, when it came, to finally allow the use of Window in the summer of 1943 indicates a clear judgment by the Air Ministry and the War Cabinet that where the air war was concerned, a turning point had been reached. The use of Window was authorised by Churchill on 15th July 1943 with effect from 23rd July.³⁶²

Yet although Window helped confuse German defences, and therefore allowed more aeroplanes to reach their target, it could not increase the levels of damage *per se*. The attacks were not otherwise radically different to many other large raids on the Reich. The key factor in the creation of the firestorm was the remarkably hot, dry weather in Germany; the plans themselves were not exceptional. Sven Lindqvist writes: “In Hamburg, the [sic] Bomber Command succeeded in doing what the heavy bombers tried to do every night when they took off for Germany.” Window did not cause greater devastation; rather it allowed Bomber Command to get closer to achieving the full extent of their ambition.³⁶³

The Operational Record Book for No. 83 Squadron reveals the vast extent of the fires created in Hamburg by the attack. The comments recorded for the raid on the night of 24th-25th July do not seem out of the ordinary: it is even suggested that the attack “seems scattered”. Those for

³⁶⁰ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 242-243; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume I*, 400-401.

³⁶¹ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 332-333.

³⁶² Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 145. See also Winston Churchill, *The Second World War. Volume IV: The Hinge of Fate* (London: Cassell, 1951), 257-259.

³⁶³ Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 205.

the night of 27th-28th July though are dominated by notes on the firestorm. Among the more lurid observations are the following. "Large mass of fires with huge pall of smoke." This image of one enormous fire raging out of control – also described in the record book as "one big mass of fires" – strongly indicates the firestorm which was raging through the city. New fires were observed to be starting within those already burning. And the impact of the fires was not just *seen* by the crews. "The heat of the fires could be felt in the aircraft". The record of two nights later is less violent but clearly indicative of a stricken city. Fires "covering a large area" were still burning from previous attacks; they were seen as "large and extensive" across a wide area. Clearly the crews attacking Hamburg were seeing the results of an especially powerful and destructive series of attacks.³⁶⁴

The first use of Window, coupled with the size of the fleets sent to Hamburg, reaffirm the significance of this attack. If these factors weren't a clear enough signal to the crews involved, according to one of the men's diaries, this was made clear in the briefings. Of Hamburg, he wrote in his diary: "It is impressed on us that this is the big one." When smoke over the city prevented the collection of a clear sense of the success of the attack, the message was redoubled ahead of his next involvement. "Ops were on again that night and the briefing was much more serious. Crews are told that they must put HAMBURG out of action and we will keep going night after night until we do."³⁶⁵

In the previous chapter there was evidence of pilots' diaries focusing on the technical nature of the raids. This is again visible at this stage of the war. The diary of A.L. Bartlett offers a great deal of detail on the nature of the raids but no personal comment; similarly Sergeant John Kevin Kilgary and Roy Moore record the raid on Hamburg with basic technical details and no

³⁶⁴ TNA: AIR 27/687, 'Operational Record Book for No 83 Squadron'. Entries for 24-30 July.

³⁶⁵ IWM: 03/32/1, 'Private Papers of J Walsh', 17-19.

comment.³⁶⁶ AC1 L.J. Wilson found the first attack on Hamburg “exceptionally interesting” for the chief reason that Window was used for the first time. He was disappointed to discover, in advance of the attack of 2/3 August, that Hamburg remained a target. Press reports had encouraged him to believe that “the town had literally been wiped off the map.”³⁶⁷ Other evidence shows that there was at times a tendency for flight crews to approach their work coolly; with a sense of duty rather than enthusiasm. In a letter to Charles Portal in the summer of 1942 Squadron Commander Donald Simmons wrote that within his crew:

“[T]here is a great lack of urgency amongst them. They do their job conscientiously but without enthusiasm. They have not the desire to bomb Germany and hurt the Hun that I should like them to have, but I must admit, lethargic as they are on the ground, when they are in the air they settle to their job with more vigour, and the nearer they get to the target the more thorough appears to be their attitude.”³⁶⁸

At this stage of the war Sergeant T. Kimmett is rare in that among the diaries found in research for this thesis in that he *does* pass comment on those under attack. Describing the “vast mass of fire” engulfing Hamburg he speculated: “It seemed impossible that any human being could survive in that inferno!”³⁶⁹ Flight Lieutenant Maurice Fordie Colvin acknowledges some level of impact on Berlin civilians during bombing raids in early 1944, yet this is framed in terms of the inconvenience – rather than terror – that the attacks would bring. “The Berliners must be getting a bit peeved”, he wrote in one entry at the end of January; a few days later he

³⁶⁶ All RAFM: MF10009/3, ‘Diary of Flt. Lt. A.L. Bartlett, 1943-1944’; AC98/58/26, ‘Manuscript diary of bombing operations over Germany, written by Roy Moore’; DC74/84/13, ‘Air Force Diary of Sgt John Kevin Gilvary, 1943’. See also X003-2754, ‘Diary compiled by E.G. Hardy concerning the air war’. Hardy’s primary focus is on charting the technical development of the bomber war.

³⁶⁷ RAFM: MF10016/18, ‘Personal five year diary of AC1 L.J. Wilson, 1941-1944’. Entries for July-August 1943.

³⁶⁸ CCO, Lord Portal Archive 2. Box B, Folder 4. Donald Simmons (RAF Grimsby) to Portal, 29th May 1942.

³⁶⁹ RAFM: B3867, ‘Photocopy of an operational diary kept by a member of 12 Squadron, probably Sgt T.Kimmett, 1940-1943’.

suggested they would be “well and truly browned off”.³⁷⁰ At this point he reserved his greatest ire for colleagues who dropped unused bombs on the return flight:

“Some bloody idiots will persist in jettisoning incendiaries on the track home and oh! lay [sic] would I like to get my hands on them. It gives the fighters all the gen they need. Namely the TRACK Home. Here’s hoping the B.....s get knocked down first it will serve them damn well right.”³⁷¹

One way to account for the general lack of comment on the fates of those under bombardment is the quite understandable fact that these men had very legitimate fears for their own lives. The rate of attrition within the ranks of Bomber Command was high: 55,573 members of aircrew were killed during the war. And this figure does not, of course, account for the narrow escapes many had. Flight Engineer Albert Edward Lambert gives a particularly clear account of this. Like others, he comments on the “pleasing” nature of an operation to Frankfurt in terms of the success it had. His plane narrowly avoided detection by German searchlights though he witnessed others come under heavy fighter attack. Of the experience, he wrote: “I am pleased to say that I have been to Frankfurt but I wouldn’t say that I would like to go again. I doubt if any human being could stand up to those searchlight belts often. On Sep. 12th every year I suppose I shall breathe a small prayer to thank God that I stood the strain.” Flight Engineer George W. Stevens is frank about his fears on the final attack during the main assault on Hamburg in the summer of 1943: “the worst and most terrifying [trip] I have ever experienced.” Electrical trouble beset a significant number of the aircraft used in the attacks. Where individuals such as Lambert and Stevens experienced such nerve-wracking operations, it is of no real surprise that they chiefly recorded thoughts on their own survival.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ RAFM: B2142, ‘Transcript of diary of Flt Lt Maurice Fordie Colvin, as a bomb aimer with 467 Squadron, 1943-1944’. Entries for 27th – 30th January 1944.

³⁷¹ RAFM: B2142, as above. Entry for 2nd January 1944.

³⁷² RAFM: X002-5464/002, ‘Flight engineer’s flying log book/mission diary of Sgt Albert Edward Lambert, 1944-1945’. Entry for September 1944; X001-0067: ‘A Black Country lad’s night shift: The diary of a flight engineer’. Entry for 2nd August 1943. See also Francis, *The Flyer*, 172.

At this stage it is also of value to return to Churchill's views on the moral question of bombing. At no point in the war does he give a clear statement, yet evidence seems to suggest some level of conflict in his thoughts. In the previous chapter, discussion showed how Churchill's speech to a County Hall audience inflated the level of public support for reprisals on German cities. In a letter to his brother in November 1941, Clement Attlee (whose private papers reveal no strong personal views on the nature of the bomber offensive) described Churchill's "extreme sensitiveness to suffering".³⁷³ This side to his character is evident in a fairly-often repeated anecdote from the early summer of 1943, shortly prior to the attacks on Hamburg. Watching footage from raids on the Ruhr, Churchill was recorded to exclaim: "Are we beasts? Are we taking this too far?" It was an example of, according to Paul Addison, one of Churchill's "qualms of conscience". Yet as Henry Pelling notes, there was always a pragmatic undertone: however unedifying the footage was, this was a direct source of help to the Russians.³⁷⁴

Yet beyond pragmatism, Churchill clearly derived pride from this specific part of the work of Bomber Command, and he played the role of enthusiastic cheerleader in correspondence with Stalin. Through 1942 and 1943 Stalin gratefully received news of successful attacks on German cities and Churchill promised more to come. In a telegram to Attlee after meeting with Stalin in August 1942, Churchill wrote: "We then passed on to the ruthless bombing of Germany, which gave general satisfaction. Monsieur Stalin emphasised the importance of striking at the morale of the German population, and I made it clear that this was one of our leading military objectives."³⁷⁵ Indeed, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt at the end of October 1942 – ahead of the Combined Bomber Offensive – arguing that: "An ever increasing weight of bomb discharge

³⁷³ Oxford, Bodleian Library: [MS.Eng. c. 4793, fol. 2], Clement Attlee to Tom Attlee, 21st November 1941.

³⁷⁴ Geoffrey Best, *Churchill: A Study in Greatness* (London: Penguin, 2002), 238; Norman Rose, *Churchill: An Unruly Life* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 274; Paul Addison, *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 194; Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 517.

³⁷⁵ CCAC: CHAR 20/79A/12-16, Churchill to Attlee, 13th August 1942.

upon Germany and Italy must be our unrelenting aim. In our view night-bombing has already yielded results which justify it being backed by the United States, at any rate as a follow-up to your day bombing.” This demonstrates Churchill’s commitment to an increasingly heavy bombing campaign.³⁷⁶ The following spring the mutually supportive correspondence between Stalin and Churchill continued.³⁷⁷

While Churchill certainly appears to have been affected by viewing footage of aerial attacks, around a month after his “Are we beasts?” query, and just a week after the end of the Battle of Hamburg, Churchill maintained his hard-line approach when sending Stalin a series of photographs showing damage to German cities:

“I hope you will find half an hour in which to look at them. This we know for certain, eighty percent of the houses in Hamburg are down. It is only now the question of a short time before the nights lengthen and even greater destruction will be laid upon Berlin. This subject only to weather. This will be continued for several nights and days and will be the heaviest ever known.”³⁷⁸

David Reynolds notes that Churchill did need “to sound particularly bellicose when Stalin was accusing the British of inertia and even cowardice.” Yet he observes further that this expressed satisfaction with the achievements of Bomber Command was certainly not limited to his correspondence with Stalin.³⁷⁹

As I will show elsewhere in this thesis, it is difficult to offer a definitive appraisal of Churchill’s views on the area bombing campaign, for he himself left no clear statement in private papers or in his history of the Second World War. What is evident here is that whatever qualms he experienced on particular occasions, he enthusiastically endorsed the campaign in his

³⁷⁶ CCAC: CHAR 20/54B/182-186, Churchill to Roosevelt, 31st October 1942.

³⁷⁷ See for example (all CCAC): CHAR 20/107/58; CHAR 20/107/64; CHAR 20/107/89; CHAR 20/107/119-120; CHAR 20/109/104, CHAR 20/110/66. Correspondence between Churchill and Stalin, spring 1943.

³⁷⁸ CCAC: CHAR 20/117/26-27, Churchill to Stalin, 11th August 1943.

³⁷⁹ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), 322.

correspondence with Stalin, and did not seriously attempt to moderate the level of bombing until after the attacks on Dresden in the final months of the war.

Bombing Restriction Committee

The national mood in the inter-war years supported anti-war sentiment. The cataclysmic loss of life in the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War undermined support for the military and during the early 1920s numbers training at Sandhurst and Woolwich decreased.³⁸⁰ Vera Brittain's 1933 volume *Testament of Youth* became a best-seller (selling out its original 3,000 copy print-run on the first day of publication) and sought to challenge the notion that the story of the First World War should be told by those who had experienced trench warfare.³⁸¹ In 1921 the No More War Movement was initiated and this body merged with the Peace Pledge Union in 1937. Among its members were many prominent public figures, including Brittain, as well as a large number of members of the public. The onset of the Second World War though forced many committed pacifists to consider whether their beliefs were compatible with the nature of the conflict, and pushed some into adopting a more pragmatic position in the face of the threat from fascism. Martin Ceadel addresses the challenge which the rise of the Nazi party presented to pacifists in Britain. How, practically, could peace achieved or maintained in these times? Indeed, according to Ceadel, the early years of war helped fracture the pacifist movement.³⁸² As A. C. Grayling has written, the widely held assumption that the war against Hitler was a just one ensured that there were fewer conscientious objectors in Britain during World War Two, and among many pacifists, there was a recognition that their pacifism would have to manifest itself in line with the realities of the

³⁸⁰ Bond, *British Military Policy*, 33.

³⁸¹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Gollancz, 1933).

³⁸² Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 124-146, 295-315.

conflict.³⁸³ In his article 'Pacifism and the Blitz, 1940-1941', Richard Overy shows how the transition to war, and particularly a movement against the aerial bombardment of civilians, presented an opportunity for pacifists to define their beliefs and, further, to involve non-pacifists who did not support that method of waging the war. The fragmenting of a wider pacifist movement, hastened by the growing tensions in Europe in the 1930s and by the outbreak of the Second World War, forced those with pacifist beliefs to defend, to refine, and in some cases to redefine, how they understood this faith. For some, as Overy outlines, the result was a shift towards helping protect civilians facing new dangers, rather than to renounce war entirely.³⁸⁴

Journalist Thomas Foley and economist H. Stanley Jevons were the driving forces behind early campaigns against the bombing of civilians. In the summer of 1941, Foley and Corder Catchpool, a British Quaker Pacifist, set up the Committee for the Abolition of Night, formalising and consolidating approaches for challenging both Allied and Axis powers to actively end attacks which endangered civilian life.³⁸⁵ The committee counted among its members not only pacifists, but also those who were opposed to the bombing of civilians. After the area bombing campaign began in earnest in February 1942 the organisation was replaced by the Bombing Restriction Committee.³⁸⁶ The bombing of Cologne was, according to the committee, the trigger for the creation of the latter body. The original members had "divergent views on the moral aspects of warfare [but] were united in their horror" at the attack on Cologne.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 179.

³⁸⁴ Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz', 203-212, 227.

³⁸⁵ Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz', 227-228.

³⁸⁶ For background information on the formation of both the Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing and the Bombing Restriction Committee, see Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 179-180 and Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz', 226-236.

³⁸⁷ Library of the Society of Friends (hereafter LSF): Peace 27/30, 'Stop bombing civilians', Bombing Restriction Committee (London : Bombing Restriction Committee, 1943).

The Quaker community more widely had not sought reprisals earlier in the war when Britain was coming under nightly attack. In several letters to the Editor of *the Friend*, the Quaker newspaper, which describe the bomb damage caused to Friends Houses around the country, there are no calls for reprisals against Germany. Mary H. Lee, from Prescott, Lancashire, wrote to say that her and her husband had found comfort – after seeing the aftermath of an attack on Liverpool – in “pray[ing] for the slayers and the slain”.³⁸⁸ At the annual meeting of the Peace Committee of the Society of Friends in 1942 the argument against bombing was still being made in non-partisan terms. Rather, this was an opportunity to challenge both sides’ willingness to bomb cities; a chance to mourn “innocent victims” in both Britain and Germany. Bombing, those present agreed, “implies a lowering of man’s moral standard.” The continued bombing of cities was evidence that “men’s minds and tempers were changing for the worse.”³⁸⁹

There is a discernible change in outlook around the time of the bombing of Hamburg and this can be seen in the publications of the Bombing Restriction Committee. Prior to the attacks Jevons and Catchpool wrote a pamphlet (having discussed the content in committee meetings) calling on the Government “to abandon its present policy of area bombing and of night bombing under unfavourable conditions, and to reduce to the minimum the incidental killing of civilians in their homes.” They referred to a series of press reports of mass destruction in German cities and to photographs which showed that Allied bombing had destroyed civic buildings and residential areas. As well as casting doubt on the assumption that the war could be won, or even shortened, by bombing, the pamphlet warned of a lowering of “the moral standard of the whole world.” What was at stake is most clearly outlined in the following statement: “This Committee is as anxious as anyone to see an end to the horrors of Nazi rule,

³⁸⁸ LSF: Box L 23/01, Mary H. Lee to the Editor of *The Friend*.

³⁸⁹ LSF: 051.56 [Peace Cttee 5/48], ‘Will hatred help?’ Society of Friends. London Yearly Meeting. Peace Committee (1888-1965) (London : Society of Friends. London Yearly Meeting. Peace Committee (1888-1965)).

but strongly objects to the inhuman and un-English practice of making war on defenceless civilians.” The BRC supported (certainly in its public pronouncements) the war against Hitler but was adamant bombing civilians was not the right way to carry out the war.³⁹⁰

The BRC published a pamphlet in the autumn of 1943 entitled “Bomb, burn and ruthlessly destroy” – its title taken from a quote attributed to Minister of Information Brendan Bracken. Setting up the argument to be made, the pamphlet asked: “Is the British nation, while winning the war, in danger of losing its own soul?” It was, the authors stated, “impossible to reconcile” the words of Clement Attlee and Archibald Sinclair in parliament, to the effect that no indiscriminate bombing of Germany was taking place, with the press reports from German cities. It is important to state here that, as with the wording of the poll carried out by Mass-Observation with regards to reprisals (discussed in the previous chapter) the word “indiscriminate” could be open to interpretation. Nevertheless the juxtaposition of the press reports and particularly Bracken’s words is striking. Bracken had told the press: “Our plans are to bomb, burn and ruthlessly destroy in every way available to us the people responsible for creating this war. The Government is already pledged to bring to trial those responsible for the war.” The contradiction in this statement seems to be glaring: the authors of the pamphlet made this clear. Again, it drives at the heart of the matter, showing that it was quite possible to support the war effort without supporting all the methods employed to try to win it. Bomber Command’s policy was, according to the BRC, ““to bomb, burn and ruthlessly destroy” *without trial*, those who are *not* responsible for creating the war, including many thousands of children.” (original emphasis). The authors called on the Government to clarify its position with regards to the bombing campaign.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ LSF: Peace 27/30, ‘Stop bombing civilians’, Bombing Restriction Committee (London : Bombing Restriction Committee, 1943).

³⁹¹ LSF: 051.54 [Peace 27/29], “Bomb, burn and ruthlessly destroy”, Bombing Restriction Committee (London : Bombing Restriction Committee, 1943) .

A. C. Grayling has examined in detail the impact of the Hamburg attacks on Vera Brittain's *Seed of Chaos* and for this reason I will not address this publication at length. It should be noted however that Brittain made careful use of the lurid foreign press reports in *Seed of Chaos* to highlight the bleak situation in Hamburg. The book was also an attempt to systematically unpick those arguments in favour of area bombing; Brittain concluded that even beyond the *moral* case for avoiding the bombing of cities, there was no *procedural* evidence that it could shorten the war.³⁹² Y. Aleksandra Bennett notes Brittain's frustration at the way in which her book was received by critics; specifically for a failure to see "that the protest was not against bombing, but against a type of bombing, namely area or saturation bombing."³⁹³

As the attacks on Berlin continued into 1944 the poet Winifred Rawlins wrote 'An open letter to followers of Jesus'. The letter is grounded in its author's faith, and laments the images of "distraught, fear-racked mothers of terrified children", and the "grief and shame" that this was now the way in which the war was being carried out. That the scale of the bomber war was increasingly dramatically, with German people bearing the brunt, was again emphasised. Rawlins references the blitzed British cities: "memories of London, Coventry, Exeter rush into our minds" but makes clear that the nature of the bombing had now changed. "[T]he scale of the horror is growing week by week", she wrote, quickly demonstrating the diminishing sense of a shared horror.³⁹⁴

Although the Bombing Restriction Committee had a staunch ally in Bishop George Bell, their wider impact and ability to shape or challenge bombing policy was limited.³⁹⁵ Like Bell, they

³⁹² Vera Brittain, *Seed of Chaos: What Mass Bombing Really Means* (London: New Vision, 1944); Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 179-180.

³⁹³ Y. Aleksandra Bennett, 'Introduction' in Vera Brittain, *One Voice: Pacifist Writings from the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2005), xv-xx.

³⁹⁴ LSF: Box L 16/13f, An open letter to followers of Jesus / [signed] Winifred Rawlins, Rawlins, Winifred, (London : C. A. Brock & Co. [printers], [1944]).

³⁹⁵ Martin Farr, 'The Labour Party and Strategic Bombing in the Second World War' in *Labour History Review*, 77, no. 1. (April 2012), 145-146.

recognised that the Archbishop of Canterbury had a more powerful voice in the public arena. The influence of the leader of the Anglican Church will now be considered to demonstrate that despite a strong will of a significant group of people to challenge the bombing policy, this strength was undermined by lack of support from an influential figure.

The Church

Stephen Lammers has argued that the Church in the United States was “generally silent” on the issue of area bombing in Germany and Japan. A similar story can be told in Britain.³⁹⁶ The official silence of the Church of England can be considered here in terms of how it was challenged from beneath. Indeed the story is one which sees engagement with the issue reaching a blockage in the form the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. After becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in April 1942, Temple received, in the months before and after Hamburg was bombed, letters from people raising serious concerns about the way in which the bomber war was being carried out. As I will outline in this section, any reservations he did have were eroded through the course of his tenure.

Temple was seen by many Christians in this country – not just by Anglicans – as, in the words of A. E. Baker, an “inevitable leader and spokesman.” Temple had been involved in the formation of the British Council of Churches as well as the Council of Christians and Jews. Bishop George Bell – a vocal opponent of area bombing – tried to defer to Temple (and indeed Cosmo Lang before him) the task of protesting the campaign in parliament, and many of Temple’s correspondents told him that his influence made him the right person to question the policy.³⁹⁷ Despite a decline in religious observance through twentieth century Britain,

³⁹⁶ Stephen E. Lammers, ‘William Temple and the Bombing of Germany: An Explanation in the Just War Tradition’. *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 19, no. 1 (1991), 71.

³⁹⁷ A. E. Baker, ‘William Temple – The Man’ in W. R. Matthews (et al: contributors), *William Temple: An Estimate and an Appreciation* (London: James Clarke, 1946), 100. See also F. A. Iremonger, *William*

Callum G. Brown writes of the Second World War: “there is clear evidence that Christian culture remained at the forefront of the national reaction to wartime emergencies.”³⁹⁸ As will be apparent in the discussion of Mass-Observation directive responses – discussed later in this chapter – a number respondents alloyed their concern about bombing to disappointment at a lack of religious protest. The Church of England remained the most obvious body for that protest.

Temple did not share the same concern about the bombing of Germany. He was though generous with his time and regularly gave reasoned responses to those who wrote to him. In December 1942 – the winter before the major attacks on Hamburg – Temple outlined his thoughts on area bombing in a letter to Ashley Sampson. Sampson, of Kensington, London, had written to Temple hoping to secure support for a manifesto, the central tenet of which was to propose a “formal or informal” pact between the warring nations to end the bombing of cities. The sentiment was in line with the feeling that the war was perhaps starting to turn in the Allies’ favour. Sampson’s manifesto outlined how Christians believed: “that a time has come in which our superior strength should enable us to set an example to the world by humanising warfare instead of increasing its horrors.”³⁹⁹ There is a certain naivety to the contention that Hitler would agree to the proposal on the grounds that Nazi aerial prowess was now weaker than that of the Allies. Nevertheless by outlining the rationale Sampson gave Temple the platform to sketch his views on how Allied policy should be formulated. He argued that restricting bombardment to purely military objectives would have three key advantages. It would ensure the British cause retained a sense of “humanity”; thousands of “innocent lives”

Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); and Joseph F. Fletcher, *William Temple: Twentieth-Century Christian* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963).

³⁹⁸ Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 163-165.

³⁹⁹ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Sampson to Temple, 5th December 1942.

would be saved; and, with a view to the future, it would “remove that growing sense of bitterness” which would impede any hopes for “a just and lasting peace”.⁴⁰⁰

Temple was largely unmoved by the proposal. In his reply he noted that while he agreed that residential quarters should be avoided in bombing attacks, he believed this had been adhered to by the RAF. Though still eight months before the massive attack on Hamburg, Temple’s faith in this aspect of bombing policy was misplaced. The official switch to area bombing was approaching its first anniversary. Temple outlined his thoughts on bombing policy (and military policy more generally). It is worth reproducing at some length here for his central argument was one which he returned to regularly in correspondence with many other people who wrote to him, even as the scale of bombardment increased. He wrote:

“The fundamental consideration in my mind is this. We have no business to be at war at all unless by fighting we can, or believe we can, serve the purpose of God. If believing that we enter upon war it becomes a primary duty to fight effectively. Indeed, this consideration then takes precedence of nearly all others. The worse of all things is to fight and do it ineffectively.”⁴⁰¹

The argument was clear: Temple was satisfied that the Allied cause was just. This being the case, it was unacceptable to constrain attacks in a way which reduce the effectiveness of the campaign against Nazi Germany. Before signing off his letter Temple conceded that Sampson may find his thoughts “very shocking. I know that some good Christians do.”⁴⁰² Here is a clear indication that even at the time, there was an acknowledgement from the very top of the Church of England that the issue of area bombing was divisive within the religious community. Sampson accepted the response from Temple cordially, but not without disagreement. Indeed, he argued that the failure to condemn area bombing would create division within the Church

⁴⁰⁰ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Sampson to Temple, 5th December 1942.

⁴⁰¹ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Sampson, 8th December 1942.

⁴⁰² LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Sampson, 8th December 1942.

when the “appalling reaction comes”.⁴⁰³ As Andrew Chandler writes of this exchange, Sampson’s letter was “a firm invitation to the State to take the moral high ground.” It was not an invitation which Temple accepted.⁴⁰⁴

In correspondence with other writers in the early summer of 1943 Temple continued to argue both that fighting effectively was the only viable course, and that he believed the RAF was seeking actively to strike military targets.⁴⁰⁵ The persistence of those who wrote to him on the subject (and perhaps the volume of letters) seem to have contributed to Temple’s rather curt tone when he replied to a request by the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship for him to receive a deputation who would make the case for a Church protest in early July 1943. Temple replied that he was very busy and advised that he saw no reason why the case could not be made in writing.⁴⁰⁶

Very soon afterwards Karlin Capper-Johnson of the Bombing Restriction Committee wrote to Temple with a direct request that he contact the Air Ministry to ask officially whether a change in bombing policy had taken place. A similar request was made by the British Council of Churches.⁴⁰⁷ Temple did write to Archibald Sinclair; he did ask whether a change of policy had taken place. Yet the phrasing of his question is far from interrogative; his tone cordial, collegial and revealing of Temple’s apparent exasperation towards opponents of the area bombing campaign. The letter is a gentle query which does not suggest that there is any intention to probe too deeply. After outlining the nature of the letters he had been “bombarded” with, Temple told Sinclair:

⁴⁰³ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Sampson to Temple, 10th December 1942.

⁴⁰⁴ Andrew Chandler, ‘The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing of Germany in the Second World War’. *The English Historical Review*, 108, no. 429 (1993), 920-946.

⁴⁰⁵ See for example (both LAM): W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Mrs Ennis, 21st May 1943; Letter from Chaplain (on behalf of Temple) to Mr Gombie, 29th May 1943.

⁴⁰⁶ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Letter from Anglican Pacifist Fellowship to Temple, 5th July 1943, and Temple to Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, 6th July 1943.

⁴⁰⁷ Church of England Record Centre: The British Council of Churches Executive Minutes, Nov. 1942-Nov. 1949. Minutes of meeting on 8th September 1943.

"I have continued to say that I see no evidence of this [a change in policy to "deliberately destroying cities irrespective of military objectives"] and believe the Government's former statement holds the field. But I should be very grateful if you could let me have a line to assure me that this is correct."⁴⁰⁸

The lack of any real intent in Temple's enquiry afforded Sinclair the chance to merely agree that no change in policy had taken place. Sinclair told Temple that: "it is no part of our policy wantonly to destroy cities". Given the switch to area bombing and the 'dehousing' discussion in the previous months, perhaps only the interpretation of the word "wantonly" can be at issue here. Sinclair's response though was one which Temple was happy to confirm to Capper-Johnson.⁴⁰⁹ On this point Chandler is clear: Temple accepted – and passed on to his correspondents – a judgment on the bomber offensive which was not compatible with the material effects of the campaign. He writes: "Temple was increasingly guilty of expounding a morality in defence of obliteration bombing which did not correlate with the effects and realities of British military policy."⁴¹⁰ And on the eve of the commencement of the Battle of Hamburg, Temple answered a letter written to him by George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, which further underlines his position. Bell was one of a small number of public figures who challenged the bombing of cities and their civilians. He was prepared to speak out publically about the bombing of Germany but, like others, saw Temple as the better positioned to do so.⁴¹¹

Bell had written to Temple the previous day to request that the Archbishop of Canterbury ask a question on the subject in the House of Lords. Bell told Temple that he was prepared to ask such a question but thought it would be better coming from the more senior man. Temple

⁴⁰⁸ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Sinclair, 9th July 1943.

⁴⁰⁹ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Sinclair to Temple, 17th July 1943, and Temple to Capper-Johnson, 20th July 1943.

⁴¹⁰ Chandler, 'The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing', 935.

⁴¹¹ See for example Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, 503-505.

rebutted the request: it is unsurprising given the content of his letters described here that he told Bell it was not a concern he shared.⁴¹²

So it was that the destruction of Hamburg began on 24th July 1943 with a good deal of concern amongst many Christians, but no authoritative word of protest. The level of damage and the high loss of life in the city had an evident impact on the pitch of the letters Temple received in the months that followed.⁴¹³ Indeed his correspondents appear increasingly frustrated by the Archbishop's stance following the attacks on Hamburg. He received a letter from a Mrs Roberts [sic] in which she both called for protest but also acknowledged that Temple's "standards of what is justifiable have changed".⁴¹⁴ In his reply Temple accepts that the attack on Hamburg was more destructive than other raids but places it within the context of the wider campaign. His underlying justification for the attack remained the same, but had evolved from what he wrote to correspondents earlier in the year. He continues to argue that fighting effectively is essential in a just war, but adds the following: "now that aviation has been invented you cannot in fact avoid such attacks upon military objectives, including industrial equipment, as involve very large-scale destruction of civilian houses." Where before Temple had justified area bombing and the fact that occasionally civilians would unfortunately be killed, he now justified the "very large-scale" destruction of residential areas and with it, the death of civilians. Hamburg was, according to Temple, a "vast" example of the "occasional disasters" which came with area bombing, but was not a reason to alter the strategy.⁴¹⁵ The

⁴¹² LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Bell to Temple, 22nd July 1943, and Temple to Bell, 23rd July 1943. Bell would go on, in February 1944, to make a speech in the House of Lords which further alienated him from colleagues within the Church. He said: "I fully realise that in attacks on centres of war industry and transport, the killing of civilians, when it is the result of bona fide military activity, is inevitable. But there must be a fair balance between the means employed and the purpose achieved. To obliterate a whole town because certain portions contain military and industrial establishments is to reject the balance." He received a great deal of correspondence from members of the public who praised his speech and thanked him for making it. See LAM: Bell Papers – 70 – Bombing Policy.

⁴¹³ Chandler, 'The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing', 935.

⁴¹⁴ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Roberts to Temple, 22nd September 1943.

⁴¹⁵ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Roberts, 27th September 1943.

letter then does not represent a wholesale change in Temple's attitude; rather a minor adaption to take into account the level of destruction at Hamburg.

Another correspondent, Denis Riley, from Horsforth, West Yorkshire, appalled by reports in the *Yorkshire Post* about Hamburg, wrote to Temple: "I am puzzled that you as leader of the Church have made no public pronouncement on the matter, as I can hardly conceive that you can approve." Temple acknowledged in his reply the "peculiarly dreadful" nature of reports of thousands of civilians drowning after the Elbe Tunnel was hit. This was though, he wrote, "in the nature of a colossal accident." Here Temple's reply receives an angered response. The correspondent read the reply with "incredulity", he writes, telling Temple that "if the R.A.F. decide that air war on centres of civilian population is good policy, you toe the line; moral and religious principles must take second place."⁴¹⁶

Ian and Dorothy Dryden from Finchley approached Temple from a different angle. Grudgingly accepting that the Church had missed its chance to take a firm stand against area bombing, they offered Temple the opportunity to support a "less revolutionary suggestion". Arguing that "the bombing question has scarcely been honestly faced at all" they proposed one of two courses of action for two controversial policies: the lack of adequate food relief in occupied countries and bombing policy. Either, the Drydens argued, those in government should assume individual responsibility for the policies, or referendums should be held giving people a chance "to place on record that a not inconsiderable minority in Britain repudiates one or both of these policies."⁴¹⁷ As with the letter from Ashley Sampson containing his manifesto, there may be a naivety here if the authors thought either proposition would be seriously considered. It is perhaps more likely that this was simply a different attempt to get Temple to engage with the discussion and justify the silence of the Church. In either case, the reply was unsubstantial.

⁴¹⁶ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Letters between Riley and Temple, 30th October 1943-13th November 1943.

⁴¹⁷ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Drydens to Temple, 2nd October 1943.

Indeed, Temple entirely omits any discussion of the Drydens' proposals in his letter to them, content instead to repeat his previously made argument on the need for effective fighting.⁴¹⁸

Several correspondents thus found that rather than their concerns feeding into a broad shared movement which could be escalated and mobilised, the person who they saw as a natural voice for protest did not support their views. Temple remained unmoved as Berlin began to feel the increasing weight of aerial warfare.⁴¹⁹

The evidence collected by Mass-Observation will be discussed in greater length later in this chapter. It is useful here though to include the thoughts of some of those people who responded to a December 1943 Directive concerning the bombing campaign. Their words demonstrate a clear sense both of an inability to effectively protest, and of anger at the failure of the church to intervene in the face of an "unchristian" campaign.⁴²⁰ One wrote: "I just wish it were possible to make some effective protest, not just a gesture calling attention to myself and of not the remotest benefit to the victims." He goes on to write: "what strikes me as amazing is the grotesque way in which our churchleaders ("Crusaders against barbarism") turn their consciences over to the military authorities – if bombing helps "victory", then bomb, whatever the Gospel may suggest."⁴²¹ This second quotation has echoes in another respondent's thoughts. He wrote: "I also feel depressed that so few of our so-called "leaders" in Church and State raise their voices against this kind of thing."⁴²² This disappointment in the general silence of the Church is evident in another respondent's words – this time with a direct comparison of the unparalleled reaction to German and British bombing respectively. "I remember our attitude to the destruction of Warsaw and Rotterdam, outcry by Archbishops

⁴¹⁸ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Drydens, 12th October 1943.

⁴¹⁹ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Temple to Sherwood, 1st December 1943.

⁴²⁰ M-O A: DR 5033, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁴²¹ M-O A: DR 1093, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁴²² M-O A: DR 1151, reply to December 1943 Directive.

etc. But now our turn has come the leaders of our Christian Churches are strangely silent.”⁴²³

Clearly not everyone who opposed the bombing wrote to their Christian leaders. Yet this is clear evidence that the lack of official protest was regarded as an unacceptable omission by some of those who were concerned about the conduct of war.

Press responses

At the beginning of July 1943 Winston Churchill had sent an ominous message to Nazi Germany. During a speech at the Guildhall in London where the Prime Minister was made a Freeman of the City, he made clear the fervour with which Bomber Command would now attack the Reich. There was, according to Churchill, “no industrial or military target in Germany that will not receive as we deem necessary the utmost application of exterminating force.”⁴²⁴

This public pronouncement, with its emphasis on “industrial” and “military” targets, was in keeping with the attempt to hide information about attacks on civilian areas. As Richard Overy writes: “Bomber Command maintained this strategic objective throughout the war, while veiling its deliberate attack on civilians from the wider public.”⁴²⁵

In an editorial in *the Times* just three days before the opening of what would soon be termed ‘the Battle of Hamburg’, the author addressed the subject of a USAAF attack on Rome. The bombing of Rome remained a controversial topic and much speculation arose over whether it could be deemed an open city. Supporting the attack – “a military operation pure and simple” – the author went on to both affirm the policy of targeting military installations and to play down the significance of damage caused to the wider metropolitan area. “To that purpose [the striking of military and/or industrial targets] bombing policy has conformed and will continue

⁴²³ M-O A: DR 2699, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁴²⁴ *The Times*, ‘A Freeman of London’. 1st July 1943, 4; *The Times*, ‘Mr Churchill warns the Axis’. 1st July 1943, 5.

⁴²⁵ Overy, ‘The Weak Link’, 11.

to conform, and from it it must not be diverted by fear of unintended damage incidental to the main necessity.” The sentiment is that the RAF and USAAF should not worry unduly about collateral damage, so long as military targets remain the key focus of bombing policy.⁴²⁶ It was with this article that Desmond MacCarthy took issue in a letter to the editor on 22nd July, two days prior to the first sorties to Hamburg. His issue specifically concerned the morale of citizens in nations at war, for whom, he argued, a secure knowledge that hostilities were being waged in a justifiable manner was vital. Morale, he contended, “depends upon the conviction that one’s own country stands for the right, for desirable life, for civilisation, which is enormously intensified by evidence that the enemy, on the contrary, cares for none of those things.” MacCarthy’s lament is indicative of that section of the British public, whose views probably account for most of those presented through this thesis, which supported the war but was not happy for it to be waged without restraint. Continuing the argument for the importance of morale, MacCarthy argued for the possibility “that bombing Rome has been good for Italian morale and bad for ours.”⁴²⁷ The flaw in this reasoning was explained in a reply by the author A. A. Milne two days later. Milne was a pacifist but, like a number of others, saw clear justification within the parameters of his beliefs for supporting the war against Hitler. Describing the fact of the precautions taken by the Allies before the bombing of Rome, Milne drew a contrast with the failure of the Axis Powers to do so before “Guernica, Rotterdam, Belgrade, London, Coventry, Exeter and Abyssinia. This [the bombing of Rome] cannot fortify Italian morale.”⁴²⁸ As the adopted policy of area bombing reached new levels of destruction with the repeated assault on Hamburg, questions began to be raised as to how this fitted in with British policy.

⁴²⁶ *The Times*, ‘The bombing of Rome’. 20th July 1943, 5.

⁴²⁷ *The Times*, ‘The bombing of Rome’ (Letters to the Editor). 22nd July 1943, 5.

⁴²⁸ *The Times*, ‘Sir, I should like to reassure Mr. Desmond’ (Letters to the Editor). 24th July 1943, 5.

The Times on the whole wrote fairly soberly about the raids on Hamburg. Bernhard Rieger has written: "The coverage of the large air raids on Hamburg in 1943 and Dresden in 1945 in *The Times* contained virtually no triumphalism."⁴²⁹ Although the report of the first attack does mention the "record" weight of bombs dropped, this is secondary in focus to the effects of the raid on the city. The article tells of "vast fires in Germany's biggest seaport"; and states that "[d]ense black smoke rose four miles into the air, and there are many reports of violent explosions." As was customary, the article highlighted that the raid had targeted military installations, in this case the submarine building industry. A Lancaster navigator is quoted from the AMNS report (also reproduced in the *Manchester Guardian*). Flight Lieutenant J. D. Henderson said: "A yellow light lit up the whole aircraft. I looked down at the fire below; it was like a huge mushroom of flames."⁴³⁰

In the lead article on the bombing in the *Manchester Guardian* that day, the mention of Hamburg's importance to the Nazi war industry does not come until after the article notes the city's "population of 1,150,000 people." Although this provides detail to the statement that Hamburg is Germany's "second largest city", the inclusion of the number of people living there does give the reader an opportunity to consider the civilian population. As the extent of the devastation became more widely known over the coming days this factor would be critical.⁴³¹ The newspaper's coverage was augmented by the use of reports from Germany. This was presented under a sub-headline "'Heavy damage' – Berlin" and was quoted without criticism. "A strong formation of British bombers last night carried out a terror raid on the town of

⁴²⁹ Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, 272(fn).

⁴³⁰ *The Times*, 'Two raids on Hamburg'. 26th July 1943, 4; *Manchester Guardian*, 'Defence swamped'. 26th July 1943, 5.

⁴³¹ *Manchester Guardian*, '2,300 tons on Hamburg'. 26th July 1943, 5.

Hamburg which caused heavy losses among the population and great destruction to residential quarters, cultural monuments, and public buildings.”⁴³²

As the days passed and Bomber Command continued to attack the city, *the Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* coverage remained initially focused on the huge fires that had engulfed Hamburg. *The Times* made mention of the observations by flight crews that the fires had been visible several miles away as they approached the city, fires which were already “so much out of control”.⁴³³ A focus on the massive nature of the fires is apparent throughout *the Times*’ reporting of Hamburg. On 2nd August for example: “great fires were still burning in the port, and smoke extended for 50 miles. Hamburg had then been on fire for eight days and nights.”⁴³⁴ The *Manchester Guardian* referred to the reconnaissance photographs taken by American planes which “showed the city still burning after the R.A.F. raid on Saturday”, and later to flight crews on a mission to Kiel, 100km north of Hamburg, noticing “two large clouds and fire” rising above Hamburg.⁴³⁵

On 29th July there is a shift, particularly in *the Times*, to addressing those carrying out the raids, rather than those under the bombs. The media were in part driven by what information the Air Ministry News Service provided, and this understandably aimed to focus on the efforts of the bombers rather than on conditions for those in the city.⁴³⁶ Both newspapers noted two days later that Hamburg had now received more bombs than any city before it.⁴³⁷ There remains in the newspapers however a sense of restraint, with no celebration of the new scale which

⁴³² *Manchester Guardian*, ‘U-Boat base left in flames’. 26th July 1943, 6.

⁴³³ *The Times*, ‘Big raids on Germany’. 27th July 1943, 4; *The Times*, ‘Hamburg bombed again’. 28th July 1943, 4.

⁴³⁴ *The Times*, ‘10,000 tons in nine days’. 2nd August 1943, 2. See also *The Times*, ‘Hamburg smoke four miles up’. 31st July 1943, 4.

⁴³⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Hamburg again’. 29th July 1943, 5; *Manchester Guardian*, ‘“Forts” raid Kiel’. 30th July 1943, 5.

⁴³⁶ Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 344.

⁴³⁷ *The Times*, ‘61 enemy fighters down in great day raids’. 31st July 1943, 4; *Manchester Guardian*, ‘The battering of Hamburg’. 31st July 1943, 5.

aerial bombardment now operated on. The closest is perhaps *the Times*' admission that while the attack had been a "severe test", it represented a "conspicuous success". "Air bombing", the article informed, had "reached a new intensity".⁴³⁸ An editorial written two days later gives further clarity to *the Times*' position. Here the policy is endorsed, but, it would seem, with a degree of reluctance, and squarely on the grounds that it could bring the war to a close. "It is a bleak outlook and there can be no doubt of the contribution that strategic bombing has made to the cumulative result. The essence of the bombing policy is the crescendo, which is assured."⁴³⁹

The *Manchester Guardian* continued to use foreign sources to tell the story of the bombing. A front page article, using information from Danish radio, told on 1st August of how "streams of refugees are leaving the burning city." Later the article continued: "Eyewitnesses say that it is impossible to have any idea of how terribly the city has been mauled. Every district has been hit and enormous damage has been caused by fire." A story in the Swedish press, based on Swedish sailors who had seen the destruction, claimed "the Hamburg population was not prepared for such violent attacks."⁴⁴⁰ The following day this was supplemented with quotations from the Stockholm correspondent of the Associated Press. "It is a place of smouldering dust and rubble...and is virtually deserted."⁴⁴¹ Reports from Zurich then added a figure of 30,542 killed, wounded or missing in the city.⁴⁴² Wounded and evacuated citizens taken to Berlin fed the rising sense of panic that the capital would be the next target of such a heavy raid, according to the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, a source for the *Manchester*

⁴³⁸ *The Times*, 'Hamburg smoke at 24,000 ft'. 29th July 1943, 4.

⁴³⁹ *The Times*, 'A bombing crescendo'. 31st July 1943, 5.

⁴⁴⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Hamburg "ceases to be an organised city"'. 1st August 1943, 6.

⁴⁴¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Heavy attacks on Nazi airfields'. 2nd August 1943, 2.

⁴⁴² *Manchester Guardian*, 'Hamburg casualties'. 3rd August 1943, 6.

Guardian.⁴⁴³ Already a dramatic story was emerging of mass death and chaos in the city – one which could not be told without reference to foreign media outlets.

Three articles in the *Manchester Guardian* published on 4th, 6th and 8th August continued to add detail to the picture already created of death, destruction and disorganisation in Hamburg. They are all relatively sizeable articles, each giving further indications of the size and significance of the attacks. Reference to foreign media sources is important, but the newspaper goes further than merely relying on these.

The first article gives context for the British reader as to the size of the area affected: “an area equal to almost seven times that of the City of London.” This was, the paper reminded readers, “the most concentrated battering in history”. As before, it is when using foreign sources that the article gains most colour. In Washington there was now an awareness of what was described as the “unparalleled horror” in Hamburg. An eyewitness speaking to the German press said: “The town, after being paralyzed by the preceding raids, became a howling inferno on Monday night...A wind rose during the attack and spread the flames.” This was the firestorm, and its effects are made more chilling by the words of a Danish consular official. “District after district was literally razed to the ground. When you drive through Hamburg you drive through corpses.”⁴⁴⁴

The second article, two days later, was an editorial under the simple and bleak headline “Black summer”. It painted Hamburg as a turning point in the war. After years of “confidence in victory”, Nazi Germany was now showing “internal strain” and “desperation”. The story also touches on the links to the First World War, saying that: “A new legend is already in creation.” “[I]f the air war brings demoralisation...it will be another “stab in the back”; it will be the civil population that has let the glorious, invincible army down.” If this opened the idea that the

⁴⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Leaving Berlin’. 3rd August 1943, 6.

⁴⁴⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘The battle of Hamburg’. 4th August 1943, 5.

bombing of Hamburg could lead to an Allied victory sooner rather than later, there was no revelry in that fact. The author makes clear not only that the bombing of Germany was worse than that which British people had had to withstand – Bomber Command’s activities were on an “immensely vaster scale” – but also, crucially, that it took in housing as well as military installations and industrial plants. “The physical destruction, both of industry and homes, is many times greater, but [due to the greater scale on which Bomber Command operated] the psychological effects are also greater.” Any remaining illusions that the RAF was only striking targets that made a direct contribution to the Nazi war effort were undercut simply by a short sub-clause. The article notes that while Britain’s “evil days” of evacuation soon ended, “Germany’s are only just beginning.”⁴⁴⁵

The final article of the three gives greater detail on the growing chaos in Germany, particularly around Hamburg and Berlin. The disorganisation is encapsulated immediately in this front page story by the observation that as Berliners were evacuated in expectation of massive raids, refugees from Hamburg arrived in the city. Swedish reports linked the scenes on the outskirts of Hamburg to evocative images from elsewhere during the war. “The roads leading out of Hamburg,” according to these reports, “presented the same picture as the French roads in June, 1940: endless streams of refugees, pushing prams and hand carts, aimlessly wandering away from the stricken city.” Further confirmation of the grave conditions came in the form of testimony from the secretary of the Danish Consulate in Hamburg, who thought that “the city appears to be dead”. References to the evacuation of “mothers and small children” and to “bombed out families” sit alongside the reference to “homes” in the “Black summer” article to once again make this a story of civilian suffering.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Black summer’. 6th August 1943, 4.

⁴⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘All Germany shaken by Hamburg raids’. 8th August 1943, 1.

From this point, the scale and importance in the German mind of the series of huge attacks on Hamburg were emphasised. “The reverses at Orel, Bielgorod,⁴⁴⁷ and in Sicily,⁴⁴⁸ grave as they are, are completely overshadowed in the public mind by the impression created by the immense destruction at Hamburg.”⁴⁴⁹ Reports in the British press after the end of the Battle of Hamburg showed the deep impression the raids had left in the minds of the German people. In a news article on 17th August *the Times* described how Hitler was “steadfastly refus[ing]” to acknowledge the suffering of those living in bombed areas. Yet it was the bomber offensive – and its increasing ability to strike at will throughout Germany – that had become the “greatest preoccupation of the German civilians”. Commenting on the “desolation and disorganization” caused by attacks on the Reich, the article placed Hamburg at the centre of the new fears of bombing. “Hamburg has become a nightmare which is spreading fear even to the remotest areas of Germany.”⁴⁵⁰ In fact, as the same newspaper had already reported, the worst fears stretched even beyond the remotest areas of Germany. An article in *the Times* in mid-August reported on the claims in the Hungarian newspaper the *Pester Lloyd* which sought to place distance between Hungary and the Luftwaffe.⁴⁵¹

During the Battle of the Ruhr, and just a month before the opening raids on Hamburg, the *News Chronicle* painted a picture of the escalating destruction caused by Bomber Command. The paper’s Air Correspondent Ronald Walker wrote leading articles on consecutive days. The first accompanied a photograph of the damage in Düsseldorf, an image that according to Walker showed “a dead city. It was killed in a night.” Later he described the new silence in the

⁴⁴⁷ During the Battle of Kursk a Soviet counter-offensive allowed the Red Army to retake Orel and Bielgorod on 5th August 1943.

⁴⁴⁸ The Allied invasion of Sicily, which began a fortnight before the opening phases of the Battle of Hamburg, provoked the crisis in the Italian leadership which resulted in Benito Mussolini being replaced as Prime Minister by Pietro Badoglio.

⁴⁴⁹ *The Times*, ‘Anxiety grows in Germany’. 9th August 1943, 4.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Times*, ‘Through German Eyes’. 17th August 1943, 5.

⁴⁵¹ *The Times*, ‘Hungary’s fear of bombing’. 13th August 1943, 3.

city: "miles of once-busy street where there is no traffic, no sign of life."⁴⁵² The following day Walker relayed the Berlin outcry at the damage to Oberhausen, where survivors "look like walking shadows".⁴⁵³ This willingness to show the true nature of the bombing campaign continued into the Battle of Hamburg. Like many newspapers, the *News Chronicle* led with the news of Mussolini's departure on July 26th, but another front-page article also opined that the opening attacks on Hamburg demonstrated, in relation to Allied air power, an "extension of its influence".⁴⁵⁴ Three days later the paper reported that the raids had been "raised to a pitch never before attained." Following the earlier description of Düsseldorf as a "dead city", Hamburg in the midst of its firestorm was given a similar appraisal. "Great parts of the city have simply ceased to exist." Ronald Walker also considered the implications for the bombing campaign in general, and how this form of attack fitted in with the current policy. He foreshadows the massive area attacks carried out later in the war, culminating in the destruction of Dresden, and is clear that Arthur Harris is directing the policy. The attacks so far, Walker wrote, "probably came nearer than any other series of attacks in Germany to the Harris aim of blotting out a target." The euphemistic tone of the words "blotting out" might sit more uncomfortably in an article more celebratory of the scale of the raids. Here though, in an article which could leave its readers with little doubt as to the terror caused by the bombs, it seems to allude to the thinking of those planning the attacks, rather than attempting to downplay their effects. A similar impression is created by a quotation which ends the article with a sense of emptiness. Another *News Chronicle* reporter, Stanley Baron, who had been at an R.A.F. base, wrote: "When the bombers had passed, the area had been erased – just that."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² *News Chronicle*, 'The dead city of the Ruhr'. 24th June 1943, 1.

⁴⁵³ *News Chronicle*, 'Battle of the Ruhr approaching peak'. 25th June 1943, 1.

⁴⁵⁴ *News Chronicle*, 'U.S. follow up 2,300-ton raid on Hamburg'. 26th July 1943, 1, 4.

⁴⁵⁵ *News Chronicle*, 'R.A.F. and U.S. in heaviest day-night raids ever',. 29th July 1943, 1, 4.

The absence of a triumphant tone was maintained as the bombs continued to fall, but the *News Chronicle* did not produce the kind of direct challenge to the bombing policy which could have led to closer attention from the censors. An article on the final day of July described, factually, the non-stop fires in Hamburg and noted that this was the biggest ever bombing attack. "The obliteration of Hamburg goes on."⁴⁵⁶ A separate article the same day collated testimony from a number of sources which would alert readers to the human cost of the attacks and their not exclusively military or industrial nature. One eyewitness describes the bleak scene of civilians fleeing the city to escape the fires and the continue bombing. "Masses of humanity, including many injured, are fleeing towards the east, not only along the roads, but along paths through the fields." A Swedish sailor suggested that the district of St. Pauli, close to the port area of Hamburg, "was as good as wiped from the face of the earth." The significant damage to residential areas was also evident. "Whole rows of houses in the Altona district, around the main railway station, are now rubble."⁴⁵⁷ The Daily Telegraph's Stockholm correspondent Ossian Goulding gave an especially graphic account. "The heat from the new British incendiary bombs was so intense that "burning asphalt made the streets look like rivers of fire."⁴⁵⁸

The reporting in the *News Chronicle* of the bomber war cannot be described exclusively as following a line of implied concern about the human cost in Germany. A more pragmatic position was adopted, for example, in an article in mid-August concerning the question of open cities. The Military Critic Major Philip Cribble considered the potential targeting of Rome and noted that in an era of total war it was necessary to recalibrate the understanding of the

⁴⁵⁶ *News Chronicle*, 'New areas blasted in 45-minute attack'. 31st July 1943, 1, 4.

⁴⁵⁷ *News Chronicle*, 'Hamburg masses fled in war's most sudden evacuation'. 31st July 1943, 3.

⁴⁵⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 'R.A.F. cut key tunnel at Hamburg'. 31st July 1943, 1.

term “open city”. Tactical issues clouded thinking. “Today, in practice to exempt the strategic centres from aerial attack would be to play directly into the enemy’s hands.”⁴⁵⁹

The previous chapter showed how Mannheim – which was explicitly *not* to have received any special news coverage – became a reference point in reporting of further bombing raids. Much the same thing can be observed in press reports following the Battle of Hamburg. Indeed, the effects of the bombing of Hamburg are presented as a benchmark for the subsequent attacks on Berlin, for example, to be measured against. The “Hamburg scale” becomes almost a refrain which runs through a number of articles written by the *Observer*’s Air Correspondent Frederick Tomlinson in the weeks and months after the attacks. This is first evident on 8th August 1943 in relation to fears in Berlin about what could happen there, and is used again months later to assess the progress so far in the attacks on the capital. “Berlin people apparently expect their city to be the next to be attacked on the Hamburg scale” ran the line just days after the final sorties to Hamburg.⁴⁶⁰ The Battle of Berlin did not commence until mid-November that year, and was not as concentrated as the series of strikes on Hamburg. Although Bomber Command made more large-scale attacks on Berlin, these were spaced out until March 1944, with the largest attack taking place in mid-February. In January Tomlinson advised patience while Bomber Command attempted to cause the same level of damage in Berlin as had been wrought in Hamburg. “[T]o expect [Berlin] to have already suffered damage on the Hamburg scale is palpably absurd” he wrote, making Hamburg the exception where the Battles of the Ruhr and Berlin were far more sustained affairs.⁴⁶¹ Tomlinson had also used the term on another occasion prior to the opening of hostilities above Berlin, predicting the continued use of massive area bombing attacks through the rest of the war. “Heavy bombing on the Hamburg

⁴⁵⁹ *News Chronicle*, ‘Germans describe Hamburg as their Stalingrad’. 16th August 1943, 2.

⁴⁶⁰ *The Observer*, ‘Berlin prepares for the attack’. 8th August 1943, 5.

⁴⁶¹ *The Observer*, ‘Battle of Berlin is not yet over’. 2nd January 1944, 5.

scale may remain the basic Allied weapon in the war in Western Europe if the programme of attack begun by British-based bombers a week ago can be taken as a guide.”⁴⁶²

The *Daily Mirror* began reporting on the bombing of Hamburg from almost a quantitative angle. A short article on the front page of the 26th July 1943 issue called the initial attack “the R.A.F.’s biggest ever raid”, while inside the paper the more substantial piece ran with the headline: “War’s heaviest raid: Hamburg’s 2,300 tons”. Having reiterated much of what the front page article said, it continued: “The attack was a record for speed as well as weight.” As expected, the paper places a clear focus on the importance of the city to Germany in industrial and military terms. “Hamburg is Germany’s biggest port and vital U-boat building centre.”⁴⁶³ The superlative tone continued the next day, as the newspaper coupled the first attack on Hamburg and the following night’s mission to Essen, stating that these amounted to “the worst weekend Germany has known”. On successive days articles made reference to the fires in Hamburg – which had themselves acted as a guiding light for the bombers – having been “stoked up” by further attacks.⁴⁶⁴ On 31st July the *Daily Mirror* called the cumulative strikes on Hamburg a “world record”, a result of “the heaviest and most concentrated hammering any target in the world has ever received.” The article also made comments about the fires still burning in the city. “Fires have now been raging in Hamburg without intermission for six days...[t]hey were burning when Thursday night’s great force started huge new fires.”⁴⁶⁵ What is notable about these articles is that they tend to use the Air Ministry communiqués as a starting point – the writers’ then editorialise and create their own phrases to highlight the story. This changes when Hamburg is next found in the news. There seems to be a shift away

⁴⁶² *The Observer*, ‘Luftwaffe defence must be weakened’. 22nd August 1943, 5.

⁴⁶³ *Daily Mirror*, ‘Hamburg by day’. 26th July 1943, 1; *Daily Mirror*, ‘War’s heaviest raid: Hamburg’s 2,300 tons’. 26th July 1943, 2.

⁴⁶⁴ *Daily Mirror*, ‘Big Essen raid as Mosquitoes stoke up Hamburg fires’. 27th July 1943, 1; *Daily Mirror*, ‘More planes go out as 4th day ends in all-out air attack’. 28th July 1943, 8.

⁴⁶⁵ *Daily Mirror*, ‘1,000 planes engaged – Huns lose 63’. 31st July 1943, 8. The quotation about the state of the fires comes from the Air Ministry communiqué, and is also used in the following article: *Manchester Guardian*, ‘The battering of Hamburg’. 31st July 1943, 5.

from the bombastic tales of destruction *caused* by Bomber Command; rather the paper subtly shifts its focus to the effects of the raid. Where before the number of bombs or aeroplanes used in a raid became a part of the headline, here it is: “Hamburg hit again – worse than Ruhr”. The description of the fires seems almost mournful where before it was dramatic: “fires still smouldered after the terrible raids of last week.” Any qualitative statements about the nature of the attacks are quoted directly from the Air Ministry communiqué: Bomber Command had “attacked in great strength”; this had been a “shattering night attack”. Gone are the references to world records or of ranking Hamburg at the top of the list of attacked cities during the war.⁴⁶⁶ Over a week passes before the next time the city is found newsworthy, and again it refers to conditions in the city. “An epidemic of typhus has broken in Hamburg, according to travellers reaching Zurich from the devastated port.” This is the entirety of the report; there is not even a direct reference to the fact that it was a series of Bomber Command night attacks – coupled with day strikes by the USAAF – which caused the devastation.⁴⁶⁷ Cecil King, editor of the *Daily Mirror*, does not mention Hamburg in his diary at this time, but after a two week break from writing, he does consider the bomber offensive as a whole. He wrote on 19th August 1943: “Bombing will reduce German production and cause much hardship and dislocation, but I have not seen any evidence that it will produce decisive results, or anything like them.” This underwhelming appraisal of the potential of Bomber Command to win the war may have accounted for what seems to be a shift in the newspaper’s editorial policy.⁴⁶⁸ Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the *Daily Express* was similarly doubtful that the area bombing of Germany could win the war. He took a pragmatic, commercially-minded view of this though, reckoning that swaying the newspaper’s editorial policy to undermine Bomber Command’s

⁴⁶⁶ *Daily Mirror*, ‘Hamburg hit again – worse than Ruhr’. 4th August 1943, 8.

⁴⁶⁷ *Daily Mirror*, ‘Hamburg – typhus’. 12th August 1943, 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Cecil Harmsworth King, *With Malice Toward None: A War Diary* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), 229.

influence would negatively affect sales.⁴⁶⁹ On this note, both the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*, having played so significant a role in the reporting of the Mannheim bombing, this time gave readers an insight into life within Bomber Command. The *Mail* reported from Bomber Command Headquarters, while according to the *Express* “[T]ails [were] up”, mid-way through the sustained period of attacks on Hamburg. Further discussion was of the airmen’s views of the bombing of cities:

They have no views on the civilian side of the devastation. They take no pleasure in attacking other than the military personnel. The rest of the population should have cleared out on Mr. Churchill’s advice, they say. Now they must accept the consequences.

That is their way of thinking.”⁴⁷⁰

The *Daily Telegraph* also reported from a Bomber Command base and under a grim headline (“City like a sea of molten lava”) reported an interview with a flight officer. He made an important point on the scale of attacks now being targeted on German cities: one which was picked up by a number of Mass-Observation panellists. “In comparison the enemy raids on London were child’s play.”⁴⁷¹ It is to the responses of members of the public that this chapter now turns.

Public responses

In September 1943, a month after the end of the attacks on Hamburg, BIPO asked their survey group, as they had done earlier in the war: “What do you think is the most important war problem the Government must solve during the next few months?” As before, bombing Germany was seen as a very low priority. Just over 1% of people supported it (making it only the 19th most highly ranked priority) with nearly 21% of people answering “Invasion of Europe;

⁴⁶⁹ Connolly, ‘The British People’, 41. See also Knapp, ‘The Allied Bombing Offensive’, 50.

⁴⁷⁰ *Daily Mail*, ‘On HQ Bridge with Bomber Harris’. 29th July 1943, 1, 4; *Daily Express*, ‘Even river glows red in Hamburg’s fires’. 29th July 1943, 4.

⁴⁷¹ *Daily Telegraph*, ““City like a sea of molten lava””. 29th July 1943, 6.

the Second Front".⁴⁷² Yet the weight of public opinion as found by BIPO, unlike the results from Mass-Observation which will be examined below, showed broad support for bombing German cities. Just under 7% of people stated "I'm against bombing", with 16% professing dislike for the campaign but seeing it as a necessity. 47% responded: "Satisfaction, getting some of their own medicine. We ought to keep it up."⁴⁷³ Bombing then, according to BIPO's results, was subject to majority support, with a minority opposing that method of warfare. By considering the findings of Mass-Observation around this time it is possible to come to a greater understanding of the nature of the sentiments of those who opposed bombing.

While some people sought a voice of influence with whom to discuss their concerns, such as those who wrote to William Temple, still others recorded in their diaries their discomfort with the growing scale of Bomber Command's activities. Before considering this form of response among members of the public to the bombing of Hamburg, it is important to emphasise that the bomber offensive over Germany now far exceeded what the Luftwaffe would do over the Britain. "[T]here was not in Britain anything comparable to the long-drawn-out ordeal which many cities in Germany had to undergo."⁴⁷⁴ This will be instructive here as it will no longer be appropriate to consider British people's attitudes to reprisals. Instead it is important to examine how people responded to bombing which went far beyond what they themselves had experienced. As Andrew Knapp has written: "[The British public] were certainly in a position to know that raids on Germany, and civilian suffering, had reached a scale and intensity far exceeding anything visited on their own country."⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² BIPO: Survey #102, September 1943.

⁴⁷³ BIPO: Survey #104, December 1943.

⁴⁷⁴ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 236.

⁴⁷⁵ Knapp, 'The Allied Bombing Offensive', 50.

In contrast to the minimal attention given to the bombing of Germany in Mass-Observation diaries around the time of the area attack on Mannheim in 1940, by this stage diarists were more willing to discuss their feelings about strikes on the Reich.

James Hinton has addressed the intrinsic biases produced by the Mass-Observation panel. It does not provide an accurate representation of wider population demographics. As the war progressed so did attempts to even out some of the demographic shortfalls: the age make-up of volunteers by the end of the war was “broadly representative of the population as a whole”, while by 1943, the over-representation of male panellists had more or less been corrected. Yet imperfections persisted: London and the South East were significantly over-represented in the panel; Scotland and Wales by contrast were particularly poorly-represented. Further to this, and an issue which Harrison and Madge were unable to offer an effective correction for, was the major over-representation of middle-class panellists. As Hinton notes, nearly two-thirds of respondents labelled themselves as such. While accepting this lack of representativeness, the diary entries and directive replies can still give an insight into how some people expressed their views of the bombing of Germany.⁴⁷⁶

Their responses in diaries take many forms, and indeed for some the sentiment is one reminiscent of the fears present in 1930s Britain. Diarist 5239, an aerodynamist in her mid-twenties, was out walking in early July 1943 when she saw a large stream of bombers leaving Britain for a sortie over mainland Europe. Her thoughts seem unresolved, hinting at a feeling of unease which she could not quite grasp. Her diary entry for 4th July closes: “I felt anxious to hear the news and to know where they [the bombers] had been. I felt very tired and rather restless when I got in, and not at all pleased at the thought of the week in front of me.”⁴⁷⁷ A number of respondents to the December 1943 Mass-Observation Directive (discussed below)

⁴⁷⁶ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 268-272.

⁴⁷⁷ M-O A: D 5239, diary for 4th July 1943.

were clearer in their uneasiness at hearing bombers depart for Germany. One man writes that the people of Chelmsford “loathe” the sound of R.A.F. planes overhead. Another respondent was more conflicted. On hearing the bombers go out, she thought: “One loathes the RAF for what it is going to do, yet one honours them for their bravery, knowing that they are defending us.”⁴⁷⁸ For others though the presence of bombers overhead merely represented the new landscape of war. Diarist 5201 was in his mid-thirties during middle stages of the war. One night he describes hearing the sound of bombers passing overhead. This came at 11pm as he was getting ready for bed, and rather than stirring any deeper thoughts, he simply counted them. The restlessness the previous diarist describes seems entirely absent as he says: “75 we got up to, then I went to bed.”⁴⁷⁹ Diarist 5342, a housewife from Blackheath, London, recounts a conversation had with a friend whose concerns are for a world turned upside-down.

“[I]n peacetime such an event as the bursting of a major dam [as occurred during the Battle of the Ruhr] would be placarded as a disaster & the whole world would have got up a fund for the relatives of the victims. It seemed terrible to her [the diarist’s friend] that we had to do such awful things.”⁴⁸⁰

These observations were all made prior to the attacks on Hamburg. When the attacks came at the end of July and the beginning of August, some diarists engaged directly with this series of bombings. It is important to note here that unlike Mannheim, which did not on its own strike a chord with the British public in 1940, Hamburg in 1943 was a well-defined point of discussion.

Diarist 5239 – the aerodynamist – perhaps still trying to find clarity in her thoughts on bombing discussed its effectiveness with a colleague. They found that: “[t]he heavy bombing of Hamburg did not seem to meet with approval with anyone in the office.”⁴⁸¹ Diarist 5216, a chemist of around forty years old, also took conversations about the bombing of Germany into

⁴⁷⁸ M-O A: DR, reply to December 1943 Directive.. Respondents 1305 and 2892.

⁴⁷⁹ M-O A: D 5201, diary for 19th June 1943.

⁴⁸⁰ M-O A: D 5342, diary for 10th July 1943.

⁴⁸¹ M-O A: D 5239, diary for 4th August 1943.

the workplace. Following “arguments” with his colleagues, he wrote: “at best the British are the lesser of two evils, and if bombing goes on, we shan’t be much preferred to the Germans by ordinary victims.”⁴⁸² He too had heard bombers passing overhead at night as they set off for Germany. His thoughts at this stage are more defined than those of Diarist 5239. He wrote:

“On some of these fine nights we hear squadrons of bombers buzzing off at dusk or later, and sometimes at night I wake to hear them coming back, and feel ashamed to think that they have been earning for us the sort of reputation the Germans earned when they started city-bombing three years ago.”⁴⁸³

The final part of this extract could be read as an acknowledgement that Britain had responded to, rather than initiated, area bombing. Whether or not this reading is accurate, Diarist 5216 was certainly not reluctant to condemn the actions of Bomber Command.

The scale of the Hamburg attacks was clear from some of the press reports and this was picked up by members of the public. In the summer of 1942 Diarist 5176, an officer worker in his late thirties, made the comparison between attacks on Cologne and the major raid on Coventry in November 1940. He imagined himself as a “helpless victim” – either in a bombed city of Germany or of the UK. To him it was the very fact of aerial bombardment which was upsetting: he drew no distinction between British and German civilians.⁴⁸⁴ When Hamburg was attacked a year later he could clearly see the disparity in scale of the RAF and Luftwaffe campaigns:

“What a terrible ordeal the people of Hamburg must be going through. We thought we were having a tough time when we were being raided, but that was only like a musical comedy affair in comparison to what is being given to Hamburg. I can, I think, only vaguely realise the feeling that must weigh upon the minds of the inhabitants as darkness approaches.”⁴⁸⁵

That the bombing of Germany was, according to press reports, on a new scale to that carried out in Britain, had evidently been picked up and accepted by this diarist.

⁴⁸² M-O A: D 5216, diary for 3rd August 1943.

⁴⁸³ M-O A: D 5216, diary for 9th August 1943.

⁴⁸⁴ M-O A: D 5176, diary for 1st June 1942.

⁴⁸⁵ M-O A: D 5176, diary for 30th July 1943.

Diarist 5261, a factory clerk in her mid-twenties, seems to have been particularly conflicted about the policy of area bombing. She supported what in her view was the long-overdue bombing of Rome in the week prior to the first attack on Hamburg. Further she suggested that critics of those attacks “should be shot”.⁴⁸⁶ But if this sentiment does not suggest a nuanced view of the debate surrounding aerial bombardment, her response to the attacks on Hamburg certainly adds depth to the picture. On 30th July 1943 she wrote: “Hamburg raided again. My goodness! it [sic] is appalling to think of the damage we must have inflicted on that town. Nobody exults over these raids, rather does everybody seem awestruck at the terrible power we now seem able to wield.”⁴⁸⁷ Another diarist did find “satisfaction” in the raids on Germany, but was uncomfortable at her own response. (The following passage refers to the bombing of Germany in general – rather than to specific raids – in May 1943). Diarist 5460 wrote:

“The bombing offensive continues and one cannot suppress a feeling of satisfaction that now they know what it is like to be bombed; they boasted about what they could do to other people, enough. Even so I am appalled at myself. I am afraid of being bombed so [illegible] I to rejoice at another’s bombing? I wish I could feel reassured about this.”⁴⁸⁸

This is reminiscent of a passage in the published diary of Vere Hodgson. On a number of occasions she makes clear her dislike of Germans as a result of the war (“I shall never bother with Germans or foreigners again”⁴⁸⁹) but still cannot rejoice at the news of major attacks. In April 1942 she wrote about hearing of the two large Bomber Command raids on Lübeck and Rostock. “We are all heartened by the terrible raids on Lübeck and Rostock. It is dreadful to be so glad – but we cannot be anything else.” She justified her satisfaction in the knowledge that British cities were still under attack: “They raided Bath heavily yesterday, and Exeter.”⁴⁹⁰ This

⁴⁸⁶ M-O A: D 5261, diary for 19th and 21st July 1943.

⁴⁸⁷ M-O A: D 5261, diary for 30th July 1943.

⁴⁸⁸ M-O A: D 5460, diary for May 1943.

⁴⁸⁹ Vere Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges: The Diaries of Vere Hodgson, 1940-45* (London: Persephone, 1999), 100.

⁴⁹⁰ Hodgson, *Few Eggs*, 277.

justification though would become harder to maintain as the balance of power in the air continued to tip more dramatically in the Allies' favour.

For Diarist 5429, a secretary in her forties, the bombing of Hamburg represented the grim reality of modern warfare. Though troubled by it, she saw the importance of the attacks and even went as far as to label the Nazis' failure to aim for such destruction in London a "great mistake". Of the bombing of Germany, she writes: "Most people seem rather appalled by the raids we are carrying out over Hamburg, etc. I can't bear to think of it, or to look at the pictures. Yet I must admit, if one is going to bomb, one must keep on at it."⁴⁹¹ This has strong echoes of William Temple's argument about fighting effectively.

This question of military necessity brings us to those diarists who were members of the armed forces. Three men in particular offer contrasting views of the attacks on Hamburg. What they share is brevity of expression; each responds in a personal way to the bombings, but none explore their thoughts in great depth, at least on paper. Before turning to Hamburg itself, it is worth examining some of the other entries in the diary of a Flight Officer, Diarist 5103. He had been involved in raids on Cologne at the start of July 1943 which led to debate on how to officially acknowledge the impact. He writes on 8th July that damage to Cologne Cathedral presented an issue for Bomber Command to resolve, and this gives us an insight into the official thinking around this time. "Our official spokesman in paper and wireless cannot decide whether to boast of hitting a German cathedral after ours have been damaged or whether to deny hotly that it was ever hit."⁴⁹² On Hamburg itself, this diarist initially writes simply: "Hamburg pranged and at a low cost."⁴⁹³ Later he writes further about the rationale for attacking the city with such force and indeed hints at the terrible conditions which necessarily must have followed such heavy bombing. "Raids in Hamburg have been most successfully [sic]

⁴⁹¹ M-O A: D 5429, diary for 29th July 1943.

⁴⁹² M-O A: D 5103, diary for 3rd and 8th July 1943.

⁴⁹³ M-O A: D 5103, diary for 24th July 1943.

and I think the end of the war is in sight. Few nations could stand it as long at this and no one can stand it much longer.” The increased scale of the bomber offensive, according to this diarist, will be a determining factor in the swift end to the war. Where he speaks of an inability to “stand it”, he is surely making reference to the ever widening areas of devastation which the German people had to deal with. Without passing explicit judgment on the morality of the raids, he seems to be clear that they will help end the war quickly.⁴⁹⁴ And certainly he had a personal interest in Bomber Command crews no longer being required to attack Germany. Just days before this previous entry he had written, in his clipped yet thoughtful manner: “Jack Childs missing last night. There is no one we could lose and regret more and I hope we soon get good news.”⁴⁹⁵

While the previous diarist considered the massive Hamburg raids as a necessary factor in the war’s endgame, Diarist 5210 was less convinced. His diary contains less of importance here than Diarist 5103, but he does still contemplate the significance of the attacks. After writing that the city had received a “terrific pounding”, he goes on to say: “Destruction must be immense, but does it help us much?”⁴⁹⁶

Another take on the situation is offered by Diarist 5113, another member of the R.A.F. A year earlier he had written, briefly, about the bombing of Cologne. He said the feeling of most of his fellow officers was: “Poor devils – but they began it.”⁴⁹⁷ He does not say whether this sentiment reflects his own feelings, but if it did, then his sympathy seems to have waned a year on when Hamburg was struck. In general he is more interested in the news about Mussolini than the attack on Hamburg, but he does leave one short comment. “Germany”, he writes, “had “asked for” everything she gets.” This matches the earlier blaming of the Nazis for

⁴⁹⁴ M-O A: D 5103, diary for 2nd August 1943.

⁴⁹⁵ M-O A: D 5103, diary for 28th July 1943.

⁴⁹⁶ M-O A: D 5210, diary for 30th July 1943.

⁴⁹⁷ M-O A: D 5113, diary for 1st June 1943.

beginning the war, and is no longer tempered by any outward signs of sympathy for those affected.⁴⁹⁸ Flight Lieutenant Norman How was another who paid more attention in his diary to Mussolini's departure than to the raids on Hamburg, albeit light-heartedly. On 26th July he wrote: "Good news today: Mussolini has resigned. He must have heard that I am back on ops!"⁴⁹⁹

With Mass-Observation diaries it is difficult to write with confidence about the level of anti-bombing feeling. Historians who have used the Mass-Observation Archive have remarked on the astonishingly rich *quality* of the material; by contrast it is more difficult to offer a judgment on the *quantitative* view of public opinion. One opportunity to challenge this shortfall is with reference to the directive replies in December 1943. Bob Willcock, who was in charge of Mass-Observation during the second half of the war, reflected on the reliability of both quantity and quality in responses. The responses, he wrote: "will reflect all the *main* outlooks and attitudes to be found among the general population...[although] not, of course...in the same proportion as the general population." With this note of caution sounded, it is possible still to gain some insight into the volume of particular feelings by looking at directive replies.⁵⁰⁰ Where the diarists write about that which they choose to record about their daily life, the directives provided Mass-Observation with the chance to put specific questions to their volunteers. 240 people responded to the question "What do you feel about the recent bombing of Germany?" The question is broad: no distinction is made for example between, on the one hand, the bombing of exclusively military installations and targets closely associated with the Nazi war effort, and on the other, the area bombing of cities. Interestingly most respondents refer specifically to the bombing of cities.

⁴⁹⁸ M-O A: D 5113, diary for 25th July 1943.

⁴⁹⁹ RAFM: MF10057/20, 'Diary of war service of Flt Lt Norman How, 1942-1943'. Entry for 26th July 1943.

⁵⁰⁰ Bob Willcock, quoted in Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 276-277.

The replies to this directive have made it possible to draw some quantitative conclusions from the mass of responses given, with the twin caveats that the sample size remains small, and as Willcock cautions, the numbers are unlikely offer an accurate mirror to the views of the population as a whole. Remarkably few respondents professed to being exclusively positive about the bombing campaign. Indeed, there is an almost even divide between those who show a stance which is absolute in its anti-bombing position and those taking a pro-bombing position. Many more still express mixed feelings. The most common response – broadly categorised – is one which shows discomfort at the bombing campaign (this is often profound) which is moderated by some degree of pragmatism.

The question was categorised as 'Priority B' which meant it was not answered by all participants; nevertheless it still generated a strong response. Of the 287 people who responded to the directive at all, just over 16% chose not to answer this question. The results of those who did answer give a strong indication that by the end of 1943 there was considerable unease among this sample group about the way the bombing campaign was being waged. By now not only Hamburg but also Berlin had come under regular attack by Bomber Command.

Around a fifth of the respondents expressed entirely positive feelings about the campaign, unmitigated by any sense of discomfort or restraint. These replies tended to be framed around the sense that German people deserved what they were now experiencing and needed to feel the effect of war in their homes; something the Allies should have "no compunction" about seeking.⁵⁰¹ In remarking on the necessity of the campaign one respondent suggested that this

⁵⁰¹ M-O A: DR 1048 and DR 1216, replies to December 1943 Directive.

was: “[n]o time for hyper-sensitive snivelling about it.”⁵⁰² There is also a sense among those responding positively that the campaign would hasten the end of the war.⁵⁰³

A similar proportion expressed entirely negative feelings about the campaign. The feeling that protest was not a viable option is again evident, as with some of those who wrote to William Temple. One respondent wrote: “I feel very distressed and angry, but feel quite helpless to make any protest, as nobody seems to care. It is definitely war on women and children.”⁵⁰⁴ It was “horrible and unchristian” according to another respondent.⁵⁰⁵ For some people the news of Bomber Command’s work in Germany brought back uncomfortable memories of the Blitz. One respondent expressed their feelings as follows: “Horror and intense sympathy with German men, women and children. Whenever I hear or see pictures of bombing in Germany, I live through London in Autumn 1940 again.”⁵⁰⁶ This is particularly revealing and suggests an enduring element to the sentiment during the Blitz which saw people who had experienced bombing rejecting the idea that Britain should attack Germany with the same or greater fervour. Lamenting a “moral deterioration”, one man decried the campaign, calling it: “as merciless as the Germans were in 1940”.⁵⁰⁷ Another man wrote of the lack of “sportsmanship” in targeting civilian areas, and how it offended English sensibilities. While he does express some sense of pragmatism, the appraisal of “our terror bombing” is severe: it was “inhuman and barbarous.” Further, he writes: “the punishment must make all civilised and intelligent men and women feel a little sick and perhaps a little shamed.”⁵⁰⁸ Another respondent described the campaign as: “a barbaric, non-ethical and disgusting crime.”⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰² M-O A: DR 1094, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰³ M-O A: DR 1200, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰⁴ M-O A: DR 1095, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰⁵ M-O A: DR 1190, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰⁶ M-O A: DR 1211, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰⁷ M-O A: DR 5216, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰⁸ M-O A: DR 1305, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵⁰⁹ M-O A: DR 5007, reply to December 1943 Directive.

The majority of respondents expressed mixed feelings on the bombing of Germany – neither offering unqualified support nor being entirely negative on the policy. Of these people, a large proportion were troubled – often deeply – by the heavy nature of the campaign but accepted it as a necessary part of war conduct. “[T]errible, but necessary” wrote one respondent very simply, although this is qualified with the contention that the targets should be military in nature.⁵¹⁰ Similarly another woman started her response: “Sick, but I feel it is necessary all the same.”⁵¹¹

Very many of those who were uncomfortable with the method of attack worried explicitly for civilian life – the thought of “women and children” under nightly attack is regularly invoked. One man wrote of what he called the “cowardly” decision to favour aerial attack over the opening of a second front. This was, he said, “preserving our fighting men, by slaughtering German women and children and old men.”⁵¹² For another respondent – a woman in her thirties – the unhappiness at the thought of those killed by bombs was compounded by the cultural loss: “I loathe and abhor the thought of anyone suffering under bombing and cannot bear the thought of beautiful cities being smashed indiscriminately.”⁵¹³ Another person found this aspect the most troubling. Among a broadly positive appraisal of the bombing, he wrote: “Of course it’s very dreadful to think of the destruction of some of the delightful German cities”.⁵¹⁴

A weekly report of Bomber Command activities after the Hamburg raids represents the level of damage caused in the city and acknowledges that this is on a level above that which had been seen in British cities. Estimating the extent of “residential devastation” to be in excess of seven square miles, the report found: “This is on such a different scale from anything which

⁵¹⁰ M-O A: DR 1069, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵¹¹ M-O A: DR 1070, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵¹² M-O A: DR 1095, reply to December 1943 Directive. See also replies by DR 1078 and 1056.

⁵¹³ M-O A: DR 1018, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵¹⁴ M-O A: DR 5190, reply to December 1943 Directive.

Germany, let alone this country, has ever experienced, that the implications of it are quite incalculable.”⁵¹⁵ The Mass-Observation directive responses show that British people were beginning to understand that this was the case. Some respondents made explicit reference to their belief that British bombing of Germany was on a greater scale to that which British people themselves had had to endure, with some clearly stating that the bombing of Germany was now of an indiscriminate nature. One man for example wrote: “I know that our bombing is indiscriminate now, it hits innocent people as well as Nazis.” He added that the conditions in German cities amounted to a “hellish experience ten times worse than any we have experienced”.⁵¹⁶ Another wrote: “One by one we are attempting to wipe out the big German cities.”⁵¹⁷ And this process would include the destruction of residential areas. “We know dwelling houses are below; gone is our insistence that we bomb only military objectives.”⁵¹⁸ Yet the words of one respondent show the enduring ability of the government to maintain the illusion that only targets of military necessity were being attacked. This respondent questioned German reports of residential areas being hit. “This I do not believe – partly because I have no wish to believe that news is so misrepresentative and misleading.”⁵¹⁹ A further concern for some of the respondents were the potential peacetime implications of destroying German cities and killing civilians. In the aftermath of the war B. Care, part of the Salvation Army Relief Team 144, echoed the idea that German cities had been far more badly damaged than those in Britain. On 3rd December 1945, she wrote: “Hamburg is just as badly blitzed as I had been informed. It is worse than anything I have ever seen in London.”⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁵ CCO: Lord Portal Archive. RAF, Folder 13: Bomber Command Weekly Digest No. 69, w/e 8th August 1943.

⁵¹⁶ M-O A: DR 1345, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵¹⁷ M-O A: DR 2734, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵¹⁸ M-O A: DR 3501, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵¹⁹ M-O A: DR 1098, reply to December 1943 Directive.

⁵²⁰ IWM: 02/28/1, Diary of Mrs B Care. Entry for 3rd December 1945.

In some respects it feels almost improper – given some of the glowing appraisals by historians of the depth and texture of the Mass-Observation Archive – to seek the quantitative: to strip out the glorious quality of the responses to find the pure numbers involved. This section of the chapter has been an attempt to touch both sides of this. Some figures illustrate the volume of people who broadly fall into particular categories: of unqualified support for or protest against the bombing campaign; of discomfort about the raids but with an acknowledgement of their necessity. These various positions are then supported with reference to what people actually wrote. In this way the quality of the responses are given a quantitative meaning – without which it is more difficult to offer conclusions on the volume of particular responses.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to address how attitudes towards the bombing of Germany were framed during the middle years of the war. The focus has fallen primarily on Hamburg for a number of reasons. The scale of the attacks and the extent of the devastation caused mark this assault as among Bomber Command's most significant achievements during the war. What is also of note however is that the radar countermeasure Window was used for the first time in the attacks on Hamburg. Fears that the technology would be copied and used in attacks on Britain had subsided to an acceptable level and this indicates a realisation that the balance of power was now favouring the Allies. The idea that a turning point had been reached was also picked up by both outright opponents of area bombing and by those who were concerned about its application. The Bombing Restriction Committee produced a significant amount of literature calling for restraint and some members of the public also felt a need for the activities of Bomber Command to be reined in. As a public figure with potentially powerful influence, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, was seen by some as the appropriate voice of protest. His rigid support for the bomber campaign even after the destruction of Hamburg had the effect – whether intended or not – of stifling grassroots

protest. This ensured that the area bombing campaign could continue to be waged into the closing stages of the war without an authoritative challenge to its nature or limits. The huge success of the raids on Hamburg would stand as a pinnacle of what could be achieved with area bombing. Bomber Command continued to seek similar results through to the destruction of Dresden in February 1945.

Chapter 4 – ‘A city of the dead’: Dresden and the end of the war

By the start of 1945 the war was approaching its end. German military strength had been largely exhausted and by the end of January the Red Army was approaching Berlin. Meanwhile the area bombing of German cities continued.⁵²¹ Over the course of two weeks from the start of January major attacks had been carried out on Nuremberg, Munich and Magdeburg. 16,000 people were killed in Magdeburg alone.⁵²² On 13th February 1945 a major bombing attack was launched against Dresden. The combination of relentless bombing and the particular atmospheric conditions created a firestorm, as had occurred in Hamburg. The attacks continued until 15th February, with the USAAF contributing further daytime raids. Prior to the attacks, Dresden had remained relatively unscathed by the hostilities, and as a result had been swelled with refugees fleeing Germany's crumbling cities. The pre-war population of 600,000 was boosted significantly, and it has proved impossible to accurately calculate the number of people killed in the attacks. The figure has been fiercely contested, with most historians now accepting that the total lies somewhere around 25,000.⁵²³

This high death toll, which occurred at so late a stage in the war, has been hard to justify. In recent historiography and popular commentary arguments have been made that the attacks amounted to a war crime. The bombing of Dresden – and in particular on its anniversary – has become a symbol of protest and anger for a re-emergent far-right in Germany. The controversy though is embedded well beyond solely the realm of extreme politics. Victor Gregg, a British prisoner of war in Dresden at the time of the attacks, is unequivocal in his

⁵²¹ See e.g. Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944-1945* (London: Macmillan, 2004); Ian Kershaw, *The End: Germany, 1944-45* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 167-246.

⁵²² Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 323.

⁵²³ For details of the attacks themselves see Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume III* 108-109; Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*; and Sebastian Cox, 'The Dresden Raids: Why and How' in Addison and Crang, *Firestorm*, 29-58. On the impossibility of calculating the number killed in the attacks, see for example Hans Rumpf, *The Bombing of Germany* (London: Muller, 1963), 99, and Overy, *The Bombing War*, 395.

denunciation of the attacks. In interviews accompanying the publication of his memoirs, he described the attacks as “a war crime at the highest level, a stain upon the name Englishman that only an apology made in full public view would suffice to obliterate.”⁵²⁴

This chapter will show that as the end of the war drew close there remained a body of British people who were deeply concerned by the scale of the bomber offensive. The targeting of Dresden, which had received little previous attention from Allied planes, drew a critical response from a wide range of sources and even at the time stood out as a focal point for critics of the wider bombing campaign. Though the controversy about these attacks has grown significantly in the years since the war, the immediate response detailed here forms the essential base for much of these arguments.

From Hamburg to Dresden

On the back of so successful a mission as the sustained assault on Hamburg, Bomber Command continued to aim for similar results in cities across Germany. Yet as was noted in the previous chapter, Hamburg was – and remained – the peak achievement. In October 1943 Churchill praised Harris for the recent successes of Bomber Command and Harris turned his attention to his next target. Further, he made clear his rather abrupt stance on the validity and utility of area bombing. In a letter to Sir Arthur Street, the Under Secretary of State for Air, he laid out his vision of the bombing offensive for the remainder of the war: “It should be emphasised that the destruction of houses [and] the creation of a refugee problem on an unprecedented scale...are accepted and intended aims of our bombing policy. They are not by-

⁵²⁴ *Speigel Online International*, ‘Dresden’s ‘Civil Courage’: A City Mobilizes Against Neo-Nazis’. 15th February 2010 (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/dresden-s-civil-courage-a-city-mobilizes-against-neo-nazis-a-678069.html>; accessed 20 September 2014); *Guardian*, ‘I survived the bombing of Dresden and continue to believe it was a war crime’. 15th February 2013 (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/15/bombing-dresden-war-crime>; accessed 20 September 2014).

products of attempts to hit factories.”⁵²⁵ Harris was confident that by launching an assault on Berlin of the same scale as had been directed at Hamburg, Bomber Command could win the war for the Allies. He was bullish in his outlook for the capital city. “It will cost us between 400-500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war.”⁵²⁶ From November 1943 – a little over three months after the final attack on Hamburg – through to March 1944 Bomber Command carried out 16 major operations in pursuance of this vision of a knockout blow. Yet Harris’s grand aims were not met. The concentration of destruction achieved at Hamburg was not repeated. As Richard Overy writes, the cumulative results of bombing during the ‘Battle of Berlin’ were, by February 1944, meagre. “[O]nly 5 per cent of residential buildings and 5 per cent of industrial plant had been damaged in heavy raiding.” Neillands qualifies the terms of the defeat for the Allies: the bombing neither provided a knockout blow nor provoked major civil unrest against the Nazi leadership.⁵²⁷ Not only this, but the effects of Window had been countered by German technological developments. As such, the advantage Window had given to Bomber Command proved to be short-lived. Losses increased and were at their highest on the final major attack against Berlin in late March in which nearly 9% of the 811 aircraft dispatched were lost. This figure was surpassed a week later during an attack on Nuremberg that saw 11% of the 795 aircraft lost in what the official historians call “the most severe disaster in [Bomber Command’s] history.”⁵²⁸ When set against the declining strength of the Luftwaffe bombing force, Bomber Command retained an upper hand. Operation Steinbock – the ‘little blitz’ – lasted from January to May 1944 but was far more ruinous for German resources than the British cities targeted. By the time the operation was aborted it had, according to Overy,

⁵²⁵ Arthur Harris quoted in Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 220.

⁵²⁶ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 61-62; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive; Volume II*, 190.

⁵²⁷ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 190-211; Overy, *The Bombing War*, 368; Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 292.

⁵²⁸ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 363; Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 313; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 192-194, 207-209; Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 318-320.

“sealed the fate of Germany’s bomber force.” Yet according to Max Hastings, the failures over Berlin and Nuremberg indicated that “time had run out on Harris” as well, and on his hopes of providing the knockout blow to Nazi Germany. Bomber Command continued to carry out raids on German cities – and of course launched the massive raid on Dresden the following year – but the Soviet advance in the East and the plans for Operation Overlord were seen to represent a more realistic route to final victory.⁵²⁹

Of more concern to the British civil population than the largely ineffectual Operation Steinbock raids was the introduction of V-weapons. With the decline of the Luftwaffe bombing force these long-range missiles were introduced in June 1944. Though they caused significant damage and casualties when hitting urban areas, strategically the V-weapons were unable to have a major strategic impact. The disruptive and deadly effect on British civilian life was however sustained until the end of March 1945.⁵³⁰ In August 1944 half of those surveyed by BIPO found V-weapons “more trying than the blitz of three years before,” while a third found them less trying.⁵³¹

In mid-1944 plans were drawn up in Britain for a Bomber Command operation code-named Thunderclap. The idea was to hit Berlin with a massive raid with the intention of definitively breaking German morale and productivity. Yet as Taylor writes, the plan in that form was not seen to be realistically achievable, and it was not put into action. This rather supports Hastings assessment above: that Harris’s vision of Bomber Command winning the war for the Allies would not be realised. In early 1945 Bomber Command instead launched attacks on German

⁵²⁹ On Operation Steinbock see Overy, *The Bombing War*, 120-122, and on Operation Overlord see Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy, 1944* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1993).

⁵³⁰ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 121-122; Gardiner, *The Blitz*, 250, 285; Calder, *The People’s War*, 646-650.

⁵³¹ Robert J. Wybrow, *Britain Speaks Out, 1937-87: A social history as seen through the Gallup data* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 16.

cities in the east of the Reich. Though not on the anticipated Thunderclap scale, these were still major attacks. The raids on Dresden caused by far the most widespread destruction.⁵³²

Historiography

Details of Nazi atrocities which emerged at the end of the war initially limited scrutiny of the Allied bombing campaign. Questions about the bomber offensive were tempered by the comparison to discoveries at, among others, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen and Treblinka. Given this context Vera Brittain could criticise the bombing campaign only by making simultaneous reference to the Holocaust. In 1946 she wrote: "The true and terrible significance of obliteration bombing, like the mass extermination of the Jews by the Nazis, lies in its utter denial of the sacredness of human life."⁵³³

The official history of the bomber offensive was published in 1961 and made reference to previously classified documents. This included the minute written by Churchill denouncing the Dresden attack which is used in the introduction of this thesis and discussed in more detail below. The authors of the official history, Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, stated that of the cities attacked in February 1945, "by far the heaviest damage was sustained by Dresden and by far the greatest proportion of it was inflicted by the Bomber Command night attack." They were critical of Churchill's attempt to shy away from responsibility, describing his minute as "perhaps, among the least felicitous of the Prime Minister's long series of war-time minutes."⁵³⁴ This publication offered a starting point for continued analysis of the bombing campaign and of the attack on Dresden in particular. The overt statement of the extent of damage caused by British forces, coupled with criticism of Churchill's reaction, made further

⁵³² Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 207-214; Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 318-320; Overy, *The Bombing War*, 383-384. See also Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 27; Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book, 1939-1945* (London: Viking, 1985), 663.

⁵³³ Taylor, *Nuremberg and Vietnam*, 143. Vera Brittain, 'Massacre Bombing – the Aftermath' in *Christian Century*, 62, no 2. (1946), 881.

⁵³⁴ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive; Volume III*, 109-113.

negative appraisals inevitable. This began with the publication of a volume by David Irving which was dedicated to the attacks. In his study he described the extent of the physical and human loss suffered in the city and concluded that the bombing amounted to “the worst single massacre in European history.” Though Irving’s reputation has since been discredited, his book certainly had the effect of driving forward the conclusions of the official history by serving to extract Dresden from Second World War and portray it as a massacre worthy of consideration in its own right.⁵³⁵ At the end of the 1960s, the American writer Kurt Vonnegut accepted this premise and introduced a wider audience to the events of February 1945. Vonnegut was a prisoner of war in Dresden at the time of the attacks, and witnessed the destruction first-hand. In his science-fiction novel *Slaughterhouse 5*, first published in 1969, he argued, in agreement with Irving, that the bombings constituted “the greatest massacre in European history.” The book and subsequent film adaptation found an audience buoyed by the student uprisings of May 1968, and angry about the Vietnam War. In his account, he neatly collects the key reasons that caused Dresden to become such a contentious issue. He states that “Dresden was jammed with refugees.” The vengeful soldier Paul Lazzaro “did not exult” when Dresden was destroyed. “He didn’t have anything against the Germans, he said...He was proud of never having hurt an innocent bystander.” Of the indiscriminate targeting, he is most damning. “One thing was clear: Absolutely everybody in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were, and that anybody that moved in it represented a flaw in the design.”⁵³⁶ By the end of the 1960s therefore, understanding of Dresden had shifted heavily. There was greater knowledge

⁵³⁵ David Irving, *Apocalypse 1945: The Destruction of Dresden* (London: Parforce, 1995), 227-245, 275. His later works, including explicit Holocaust denial, have contributed to the discrediting of his reputation. See, for example, his failed libel case against Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books. His views and his approach to his subjects must be separated from the impact that *Apocalypse 1945*, in particular, had. Alexander McKee, for example, credits the “tremendous furor” created by the book with the increased receptiveness among publishers to the subject of the Dresden bombings.

⁵³⁶ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5 or the Childrens Crusade: A Duty Dance With Death* (New York: Random House, 1991), 101-180.

of the extent of the damage and Vonnegut's novel had also served to popularise the information about the Dresden attacks.

These developments led to a greater tendency amongst historians to view Dresden as an unnecessary target, even an unacceptable one. Telford Taylor, who acted as Counsel for the Prosecution in the Nuremberg trials, wrote in 1970 that "it is a terrible memory that we did not stay our hand at Dresden, when the war was as good as won." He added that "[i]t is difficult to contest the judgment that Dresden and Nagasaki were war crimes, tolerable in retrospect only because their malignancy pales in comparison to Dachau, Auschwitz and Treblinka." Following Brittain's cue he qualifies his judgment of Allied air strategy with reference to the more despicable crimes carried out by the Nazis.⁵³⁷ Anthony Verrier concurred with the view that the Allies went too far at Dresden, arguing that the raids showed a loss of perspective and restraint on the part of the Allies. To him, it "exemplifie[d] the dangers of carrying an idea to its logical conclusion". This opinion is supported by the work of Freeman Dyson, a physicist who worked for Bomber Command during the war. He describes the Dresden firestorm as a "fluke" – the result of repeated attempts to recreate the damage at Hamburg a year and a half previously. Dyson tempers his acknowledgement of this success with the admission that "Dresden had little military importance, and anyway the slaughter came too late to have any serious effect on the war." Based on Dyson's recollections, which show the continuation of hostilities beyond the necessary point, it is hard to argue with Verrier's indictment.⁵³⁸

The Dresden controversy had by this stage acquired a steady momentum thanks to this range of publications kick-started by Webster and Frankland in 1961. Alexander McKee was unable to interest publishers in a book on the subject in 1958. This changed in 1982, after the

⁵³⁷ Taylor, *Nuremberg and Vietnam*, 143.

⁵³⁸ Anthony Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive* (London: Pan Books, 1974), 305, and Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (London: Harper Colophon, 1981), 28.

“tremendous furore” created by David Irving and the subsequent wave of historiography. McKee’s oral history approach – he spoke both to Allied aircrew and survivors of the raids – allowed for greater understanding of the conditions experienced in the city and the reservations of those who created them. The book was a further source of questions over the legitimacy of the bombing.⁵³⁹

These questions were amplified through the 1990s and the start of this century. The sustained attempt by German academics to address why such a dearth of literature on the physical effects of the bombing existed at the end of the war. W. G. Sebald considered the question in a series of lectures which were later collected in a single volume. He blamed the lack of work immediately after the war for the situation where: “it is hard to form an even partly adequate idea of the extent of the devastation suffered by the cities of Germany in the last years of the Second World War, still harder to think about the horrors involved in that devastation.” According to his research, the images of destruction had not entered the “national consciousness.” He found further that: “quite a number of those affected by the air raids...regarded the great firestorms as a just punishment, even an act of retribution on the part of a higher power with whom there could be no dispute.” This important point shows that the justifiable disparity between considerations of the Allied air policy on the one hand, and the Holocaust on the other, was also accepted in Germany. Yet more recently Jörg Friedrich appeared to cast doubt on this position in *The Fire*, which has been discussed in previous chapters. It here becomes important to remember that whatever criticism is levelled at those who carried out the Dresden raids, they were carried out as a part of the necessary fight against German fascism and expansionism. Andreas Huyssen recently made this point clear in Bill Niven’s *Germans as Victims*, another book which contributed to the recent trend to

⁵³⁹ Alexander McKee, *Dresden 1945: The Devil’s Tinderbox* (London: Souvenir Press, 1982), 21.

consider how Germans experienced the dying days of the war as fighting centred on the Reich.⁵⁴⁰

Other recent texts have been written by authors seeking to defend the attack on Dresden. Patrick Bishop's *Bomber Boys* is one such example. It contains some contemporary accounts of the attacks, but, like Nichol and Rennell's *Tail End Charlies*, relies heavily on oral history created in the post-war period. Although useful resources, the approach does allow hindsight to influence the discussion.⁵⁴¹ Against this background, Richard Overy's 1995 publication *Why the Allies Won* – fifty years on from Dresden and the end of the war – gains greater significance. He described the vital part that the aerial policy had on the victorious outcome of the war. This added a different dimension to future appraisals of the Bomber Offensive, and in particular the Dresden raids. Since air power "proved to be the critical weakness on the Axis side and the greatest single advantage enjoyed by the Allies", it became important to consider how the offensive was carried out. Whether Dresden still looked excessive when accepting the vital and primary contribution made by the Bomber Offensive to an Allied victory would need to be tested. If it did, it would become even harder to justify that attack.⁵⁴² Another important publication came in 2004 courtesy of Frederick Taylor. His book, like Overy's, offered some perspective to the historiography which went before. Also like Overy, Taylor acknowledges the vital role played by Allied air forces. The book is meticulously researched and is more sympathetic to the reasoning for the decision to bomb Dresden. Yet there is still a clear indication of the position Dresden has now assumed. Taylor writes: "The historic heart of one of Europe's finest cities had been obliterated, along with most of the human beings who lived

⁵⁴⁰ Sebald, *On the Natural History*, 3-14, Friedrich, *The Fire*, Andreas Huyssen, 'Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad' in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 189.

⁵⁴¹ John Nichol and Tony Rennell, *Tail-End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45* (London: Penguin, 2004), and Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, 346-347. On memory composure, see Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', 65-93.

⁵⁴² Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Pimlico, 1995), 322-323. See also Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 89-90.

there. It represented to most Germans, and many other neutrals, an outrage, the apogee of terror.”⁵⁴³

In 2006 Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang edited a collection specifically on the Dresden bombings. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Donald Bloxham used his chapter to explicitly describe the bombing of Dresden as a war crime. The greatest success of the collection was its up to date interpretation of why Dresden matters, including how the rebuilding of the city has kept discussions current. Alan Russell stated that Dresden “has come to stand for something greater than its own suffering in war and has succeeded in uniting victims and victors alike in their understanding of this image.”⁵⁴⁴ A. C. Grayling’s *Among the Dead Cities* also dealt with the legacy of area bombing, warning that “we are at risk of repeating mistakes if we do not face up to their commission in the past.”⁵⁴⁵ Given the charged nature of the historiographical debate, it is worth now going back to consider the operational aspects of the attacks themselves.

Operations

Central to the controversy over the raids on Dresden has been the massive loss of life on the one hand, compared with the relatively light damage caused to military targets on the other. As John Ellis has advised, the railway marshalling yards, which were the stated targets for the Allied bombs, were functioning at a reduced level “within three or four days [of the attacks].”⁵⁴⁶ In stark contrast to the sheer chaos caused in the built-up areas of the city, the attacks by both British and American aircraft caused damage to the rail network in the city

⁵⁴³ Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 366.

⁵⁴⁴ Bloxham, ‘Dresden as a War Crime’, 180-208; and Alan Russell, ‘Why Dresden Matters’ in Addison and Crang, *Firestorm*, 162.

⁵⁴⁵ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 89-90, 274.

⁵⁴⁶ John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War* (London: André Deutsch, 1990), 188.

without entirely knocking it out.⁵⁴⁷ In any case, the bombs dropped by Bomber Command, which created the firestorm that raged through the city, did not affect the railway. The damage caused there was by the USAAF which followed up the attacks after the firestorm had been raised.⁵⁴⁸ Inevitably once the controversy began, much of the attention fell on, and made villains of, those who planned and carried out the attacks. Max Hastings later wrote:

“For the first time since the bomber offensive began, on the news of the destruction of Dresden a major wave of anger and dismay swept through Whitehall and the Air Ministry, echoed in Parliament, and finally reached the gates of High Wycombe [Bomber Command Headquarters]. Urgent questions were asked by important people about the reasons for destroying the city.”⁵⁴⁹

This section of the chapter will examine these questions: why they arose, and the form that they took. The first official bulletin on the attack was released by the RAF on the morning of 14th February. As Robin Neillands writes, great stress was placed on the military nature of the attack:

“Unlike previous bulletins, this one went into great detail about the target, stressing Dresden’s contribution to the German military machine and emphasizing that it was a legitimate target and the centre of a railway network sending troops to the east. This emphasis, this tendency to protest too much, inevitably attracted attention.”⁵⁵⁰

Aside from the attention raised simply by the existence of so much detail in this bulletin, it also raised the question of why Dresden – if so important to the German cause – had not previously been targeted. While there had been earlier attacks on the city – one in October 1944 and another in January 1945 – the raids that form the subject of this enquiry were by far the heaviest. They were also the first to target the residential areas. Before the attack of February 1945 the few attacks which had taken place had not had widespread or long-lasting

⁵⁴⁷ Henry Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (London: Greenhill, 2001), 320.

⁵⁴⁸ Biddle, ‘Air Power’, 154.

⁵⁴⁹ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 342-343.

⁵⁵⁰ Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 367. See TNA: AIR 34/606, ‘Dresden: interpretation reports and photographs’. February-April 1945.

consequences.⁵⁵¹ Henry Probert alludes to a sense of panic in the offices of Bomber Command as it became clear that they had “far less information about the city than for most other potential targets, which made them wonder how strong was the case for the attack.”⁵⁵² Sir Cuthbert Morley Headlam, a former Conservative minister, recorded immediately his dismay. “Dresden also is being smashed to pieces – it is an abominable business – but it cannot be helped in these enlightened days and no one now seems to have any compunction in killing crowds of civilians, so long as they are German or Japanese.” He described the raids as “hateful”, and justifiable only in the hope that such actions would “sicken people of war.”⁵⁵³

A series of reports filed by the aircrew who took part in the raids pointed to probable devastation. A report from the first night of bombing stated: “Smoke plumes rose to 15000 ft. Late arrivals reported the target area a sea of fire with the glow visible 160 miles away on route home...This is considered an excellent attack.”⁵⁵⁴ The excellence of the attack in terms of what had been aimed for would later be described by Freeman Dyson, a physicist working for Bomber Command. Having created a firestorm in Hamburg in 1943, the aim thereafter was to repeat the effect. “We were trying every time to raise a fire storm. There was nothing special about Dresden except that for once everything worked as we intended. It was like a hole in one in a game of golf.” This point is key for two reasons. First, it shows the level of luck involved in creating a firestorm: other factors beyond the control of Bomber Command could not be relied upon. Second, like the speech given by Richard Peirse in November 1941 and discussed in chapter two, this thoroughly undermines the publicly made claim that only

⁵⁵¹ Dudley Saward, *‘Bomber’ Harris* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1987), 590.

⁵⁵² Probert, *Bomber Harris*, 318-319.

⁵⁵³ Cuthbert Headlam, *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: The Headlam Diaries 1935-1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 447. Entry for 16th February 1945.

⁵⁵⁴ TNA: AIR 34/606, as above. Interpretation report, 13th February 1945.

military targets were being sought. The intention to raise a firestorm shows a far less discriminating approach.⁵⁵⁵

With doubts already surfacing over the suitability of Dresden as a target, the roaring success began to seem excessive. A further report detailed how the extent of the fires in the city affected the manner of attacks. "Towards the end of the attack the fires had reached such intensity that it became difficult to distinguish markers." As a result, the report went on to say, the master bomber switched the instruction to aim bombs at the centre of the fires in the absence of a discernible target. Adding to the already mounting evidence of Bomber Command being ill equipped to deal with its own success was the further submission that this had largely been an undefended attack. "Ground defences were very weak with only a small amount of heavy flak and no searchlights."⁵⁵⁶ At this stage of the war, "Allied heavy bombers were available in large numbers and could fly with near impunity over German...air space."⁵⁵⁷ The interpretation reports following the bombing showed the extent of the damage to the city. As the thick smoke began to clear, a view of the ruined city began to emerge. A report from the afternoon of 15th February reported that the "Northwestern section of Dresden, which was previously obscured by dense smoke clouds, is now seen to be heavily damaged." Twenty-four hours later, the picture was clearer still. "It is now apparent that the whole central, south and eastern sections of Dresden have been extensively gutted."⁵⁵⁸ The sum of these fragments of information coming back from Dresden was that Bomber Command had lit huge fires throughout the centre of the city, to the extent that the last of the planes to arrive had only fire to aim at. They were able to do this with minimal resistance from German defences. A month later reconnaissance reports painted a picture of massive destruction through the city:

⁵⁵⁵ Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, 28.

⁵⁵⁶ TNA: AIR 34/607, 'Dresden: interpretation reports photographs and tactical target dossier'. April 1942 – April 1945. Quotes from 'No. 6 Group Summary of Operations Night 13/14th February 1945'.

⁵⁵⁷ Biddle, 'Air Power', 153.

⁵⁵⁸ TNA: AIR 34/606, Interpretation report, 16th February 1945.

clearly this had been a devastating attack. "Damage in the city of Dresden is concentrated and intense and it is estimated that of the fully built-up area, 85% is destroyed." The extent of residential destruction was made clearer a week later. "Damage to business / residential property in the centre of the city and inner residential suburbs is intense and whole rows of buildings as well as detached and semi-detached villas are gutted."⁵⁵⁹

During Richard Stokes' lengthy debate in the House of Commons over aerial bombing in light of the Dresden raids – to be discussed later in this chapter – he stated that: "I have been told over and over again in my travels that [you] find responsible people in the Army and Air Force protesting against this mass and indiscriminate slaughter from the air."⁵⁶⁰ Evidence in this area shows the immediate uncertainty about the moral justification for the attacks. These initial reactions provided the background to the debate that grew over the following decades.

Immediate responses from aircrews which offer a critique of the bombing policy have proved far more elusive than retrospective accounts: reasons for this have been discussed in chapter three. Many of the initial responses fulfil an official role, and therefore are not given to wider comment. Operational Record Books, for example, which were filled in for every sortie, tend to provide purely factual accounts of the missions. They provide such details as the time and date of the mission, and the type and amount of bombs dropped. For this reason, the edited collection of Bomber Command war diaries provides little in the way of comment.⁵⁶¹ A good deal of the contemporary pilots' records are similar, and give no insight into their reflections on their work. One such exception to the norm was Ken Sidford, a pilot who flew in the Dresden mission. He kept a fairly substantial diary of his time in the air force, and the entries he made in February 1945 display a more critical response to the raids. His choice of words to describe the Dresden attacks is especially telling. J. M. Spaight had written twenty years

⁵⁵⁹ TNA: AIR 34/606, Interpretation report, 16th March 1945.

⁵⁶⁰ Hansard (Fifth Series) 1944-45, Volume 408. 6th March 1945, column 1900.

⁵⁶¹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 663-664.

previously that in the future, “aircraft may be used...to create in the enemy population as a whole a feeling of depression and hopelessness”.⁵⁶² Sidford appears to have recognised the fulfilment of this prediction, and shows his disapproval. First he notes that “Dresden is apparently a big army base, and is also full of refugees – somewhat murderous.” Given the number of accounts that offer little or more often nothing by way of opinion, this stands out for two key reasons. First, the fact that Sidford picks up on the refugee question at all is immediately striking and offers further confirmation that civilians were directly under attack in Dresden. Second, the fact that he considers the attacks on refugees as “somewhat murderous”, rather than seeing them as an opportunity to strike a weighty blow, gives an insight into his mind-set. Through these passages in his diary he shows no sign of wanting vengeance, or of wanting to crush German morale. He proceeds to write that the fires from earlier raids were visible 50 miles from the target area, and repeats that “the bombing must have been murderously effective.” It is evident from these passages that Sidford was focused on the mission, reporting as he does on its effectiveness, but the repeated use of the word “murderous” suggests discomfort with the notion of targeting civilians.⁵⁶³ For a man clearly affected by the intended results of his work, he may later have come to regret his unfortunate choice of words to describe the conditions in the cockpit. He recorded in his diary that the missions were: “chiefly memorable because of the heat. The sun shining on the perspex just cooked me”. As more and more details – both of the firestorm and of the horrific ways in which people died – emerged in the ensuing weeks, months and years, it is easy to imagine Sidford reflecting on the tragic irony of this passage.⁵⁶⁴ Flying Officer Robert Eric Wannop offers a further sense of the intensity of the fires which could be seen from air above the city. In his diary entry for 13th February – the night of the first attack – he writes: “Whole city one

⁵⁶² J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights* (London: Longmans, 1924), 239.

⁵⁶³ Second World War Experience Centre (hereafter SWWEC): LEEWW:2007.505, Diary of Sidford, K. A. Entry for 13th February 1945.

⁵⁶⁴ SWWEC: LEEWW:2007.505, as above. Entries for 14-18th February 1945.

mass of flames, target area at 19000' so bright we could see each other + our own vapour trails."⁵⁶⁵

Evidence collected by Stephen A. Garrett suggests that Ken Sidford was part of a larger collective of airmen who were uncomfortable with the attacks on Dresden. He describes how some of the squadrons that took part in the raids "voted to forgo a customary ritual – the dropping of bits of concrete and other junk intended as an insult to the Germans."⁵⁶⁶ As Eric Markusen and David Kopf have written, those planning the raids on Dresden "were well aware of the tide of refugees" whose presence ensured there were many more people in the city than usual.⁵⁶⁷ Authorising attacks in the east of the German Reich, Sir Archibald Sinclair recommended strikes against "Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and associated cities where heavy attack will cause great confusion in civilian evacuation from the East."⁵⁶⁸ In a briefing note to Bomber Command squadrons preparing to embark on the Dresden mission, the aircrew were told of the intention of the attack; "to hit the enemy where he will feel it most". A. C. Grayling describes the "degree of moral set-aside" needed to target a city with an inflated civilian population, knowing that Germany would be most heavily affected by this, as "breathtaking".⁵⁶⁹ We can learn from the diary of Ken Sidford that at least some of the men involved knew at the time that the population of Dresden had been boosted by an influx of refugees. By omitting the ritualistic dropping of inert missiles, some of the airmen involved removed a level of anger from their strikes and returned the bombing to purely its functional level. This echoes "the craftsman's delight in a well-aimed bomb" described in chapter two and Squadron Commander Donald Simmons' observation in chapter three about his men working

⁵⁶⁵ IWM: 80/30/1, Diary (Wannop R E Flying Officer). Entry for 13th February 1945.

⁵⁶⁶ Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 83.

⁵⁶⁷ Eric Markusen and David Kopf, *The Holocaust and Strategic Bombing: Genocide and Total War in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 161.

⁵⁶⁸ Quoted in Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive*, 101. See also McKee, *Dresden 1945*, 102.

⁵⁶⁹ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 260.

“conscientiously but without enthusiasm.”⁵⁷⁰ Getting the job done effectively appears to be valued over enjoyment at the thought of killing Germans. The technical aspects of the raids attracted the attention of those involved, rather than the opportunity to cause widespread damage.

Sidford appears to recognise the moral issues involved in attacking Dresden with such force and therefore stands out from those who have used only the benefit of hindsight to criticise the raids. The question of guilt for the individual airmen involved in the Dresden raids, like Ken Sidford, is contentious. After the war, Bomber Command personnel did not receive the same flow of honours as other sectors of the armed forces. John Nichol and Tony Rennell, in what seems to be a thinly veiled swipe at David Irving, argued recently that “[b]ooks on Dresden quoting huge and inaccurate casualty figures further added to the shame heaped on Harris and his men.”⁵⁷¹ More recently A. C. Grayling’s *Among the Dead Cities* emphasised the continuing confusion this question causes. Early in his book he states that the query is against those who authorised the raids, and emphatically not against the aircrew who carried them out. Yet later he reverses this position, stating: “Should airmen have refused to carry out area-bombing raids? Yes.”⁵⁷² The post-war attempts to extricate the airmen from blame are founded on this rather confused base.

Neville Wylie has shown how Allied prisoners of war gave a range of responses to bombing raids on German cities. Even leaving aside the fact that with Allied bombing attacks came the risk of death for prisoners of war, mixed views were expressed on the morality of such raids. Though some understandably celebrated, others, particularly as the later stages of the war

⁵⁷⁰ M-O A: FR 569, as above; CCO, Lord Portal Archive 2. Box B, Folder 4. Donald Simmons (RAF Grimsby) to Portal, 29th May 1942.

⁵⁷¹ Nichol and Rennell, *Tail-End Charlies*, 397.

⁵⁷² Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 10 and 277.

brought heavier raids, were far less comfortable with the evidence of attacks on civilians.⁵⁷³ The diaries of two friends who were prisoners of war near Dresden in 1945 survive as excellent insights into the reaction to the raids of two members of the armed forces: both of whom fell into the latter category. They can offer a unique perspective of the events due to the combination of their first-hand experience of the destruction and their lack of influence by press reports. What they saw, and then wrote in their pocket diaries, is as close to a record of the events uninfluenced by outside sources as can be expected to be found. Alec White and Harry Goodwin were in captivity in the town of Cossebaude, just outside Dresden itself. Their initial reaction to the raids was fairly non-committal. They treat the events light-heartedly, with Goodwin concerned about possible “reprisals on us tomorrow re: skilly⁵⁷⁴ and rations etc.” White notes he has had three Polish cigarettes that day, and that “[i]t’s a hard job packing smoking in...” Incarcerated away from Dresden, neither had yet witnessed the aftermath of the bombing attack. A note in the papers accompanying Goodwin’s diary explains that for their safety, all prisoners were kept in the camps until 21st February.⁵⁷⁵

The shift in both men’s moods is quickly apparent once they are sent to work clearing up after the raids. White was not involved in the working party on 22nd February, but noted that “Harry said it was terrible.”⁵⁷⁶ Goodwin’s own entry for the day is purely factual. Nevertheless, by the 26th, he was moved to write that “Dresden has had it!” He adds an observation that lends this chapter of the thesis its title; that “[t]he lads say the town is ‘a city of the dead’”.⁵⁷⁷ The following day White noted in his diary that “Dresden in a fuck of a state.” By this stage he appears to have become drained by the work. His entries had become brief, and were stripped

⁵⁷³ Neville Wylie, ‘Muted Applause? British Prisoners of War as Observers and Victims of the Allied Bombing Campaign over Germany’ in Baldoli, Knapp and Overy, *Bombing, States and Peoples*, 262-264, 269-273.

⁵⁷⁴ Porridge or soup.

⁵⁷⁵ IWM: 02/46/1: Pocket diary (White A), and 02/46/1: Pocket diary (Goodwin H H). The entries quoted here are from 13th February 1945 (Goodwin) and 14th February 1945 (White).

⁵⁷⁶ IWM: 02/46/1. Entry for 22nd February 1945.

⁵⁷⁷ IWM: 02/46/1. Entry for 26th February 1945.

of the humour or personal observations of previous notes. On 2nd March he recorded the following: "Working in bombed house. Plenty of dust flying around." The following day his entry read simply: "Work all day! Deadly."⁵⁷⁸

Harry Goodwin continued to write more substantially for longer than his friend, but he too was evidently shocked by the effects of the raids, particularly the fact of the number of bodies left behind. On 27th February he did not work, but recorded what he heard from White. "Alec goes to Dresden working in the cemetery. Numerous dead bodies are strewn over the pavements. Some of the lads have the job of moving them." Two days later Goodwin was back at work. "There's quite a number of bodies laying [sic] in the streets after being extricated from the cellars. My word, what a stench!" On 4th March, he wrote: "What a time we are having working all weekend. It doesn't seem at all like Sunday today. The town is dead and we are still in the streets working, that is Alec and me. Some of the lads are digging out the dead. What a stench there is!" As the days progress his entries become shorter, and in common with White's diary, pick out the more macabre details of the day. The entry for 6th March was short: "Feeling browned off and glad to see 4 o'clock today. Brought out two bodies today." Three days later he offered a similarly brief entry: "A few more dead bodies brought out."⁵⁷⁹ Taken together, the accounts of these two men tell the story of the ubiquity of death in Dresden. The tone changes from light-hearted observations about life in captivity to sombre, quiet reflection on the death and destruction around them. Their diaries provide a harsh reminder. David Divine writes: "To accept that this was a war of sophisticated weaponry has become a convention in the West, but it was in reality a war of desperate attrition, and victory in the end hinged upon human death."⁵⁸⁰ This was brought into clear focus in Dresden. The Bomber Offensive had, according to John Ellis, "begun as a radical technological solution to the

⁵⁷⁸ IWM: 02/46/1. Entries for 27th February, 2nd March, and 3rd March 1945.

⁵⁷⁹ IWM: 02/46/1. Entries for 27th February, 1st March, 4th March, 6th March, and 9th March 1945.

⁵⁸⁰ David Divine quoted in Ellis, *Brute Force*, 526.

deadlock of trench warfare but itself ended up being governed by the same logical vicious circle that had determined the course of operation on the Western Front.”⁵⁸¹ Alec White and Harry Goodwin experienced and recorded the very visible aftermath.

The major contribution that these diaries can give to our understanding of the Dresden raids is that they are a contemporary British perspective on the destruction that was wrought. As W. G. Sebald would later argue, few writers in Germany tackled the subject of “the extent, nature and consequences of the catastrophe inflicted on Germany by the air raids.”⁵⁸² White and Goodwin did, but their written reflections came back to Britain with them. Their value now is in their ability to help us see beyond unwieldy death tolls and dry operational record books, and to begin to understand how British prisoners of war dealt with the end results of attacks by Bomber Command. John Ellis has written: “it is the sheer scale of the loss of human life...that must always be borne in mind when reading accounts of bomber operations that seem unable to see beyond the plotting table, the instrument panel or the headset.”⁵⁸³ The diaries of Alec White and Harry Goodwin help sharpen our understanding of what actually happened in Dresden. They display a very human reaction to mass death, a reaction that does not encompass thoughts of vengeance or justice. Perhaps what is most striking therefore is what the diarists don’t say. There is no suggestion in either diary that the men welcomed the bombing for what it might mean for the Allied war effort. While it would later become apparent that the destruction of Dresden was not a significant factor in the German defeat there is no recorded sense of joy at the huge strikes against the nation holding the two men captive. Here were men who had carried out the physical acts of war and who were now dismayed by the ultimate results of the campaign.

⁵⁸¹ Ellis, *Brute Force*, 527.

⁵⁸² Sebald, *On the Natural History*, 69. An exception is Hans Erich Nossack, *The End: Hamburg 1943* (London: Chicago University Press, 2004).

⁵⁸³ Ellis, *Brute Force*, 527.

It is evident from the research described in this chapter that Dresden stood out immediately to some armed forces personnel as separate from other targets on Nazi territory. Ken Sidford considered his work “murderous”, and other airmen rejected a previously practiced bombing ritual. Alec White and Harry Goodwin did not celebrate the destruction of the city where they were held captive; instead they were sickened by the death and destruction which was encountered.

The reconnaissance reports which describe the vast damage to the city, the unusual detail given regarding the importance of Dresden and the foreign press accounts (discussed below) gave succour to those who had long criticised Allied bombing policy. Throughout the war, a number of politicians had steadfastly stuck to their conviction that the Allies should not pursue an area bombing strategy over Germany, and that history would look unkindly upon them for doing so. In parliament Richard Stokes MP gave voice to this concern.⁵⁸⁴

In the House of Commons on 6th March 1945, Stokes stood to question what he called the “blanket bombing” of German cities in light of the Dresden raids. The man who his questions challenged, Sir Archibald Sinclair, chose to leave the House before Stokes spoke. Stokes was not a pacifist but he had long opposed area bombing as a policy.⁵⁸⁵ However, in this instance, he claimed to “leave out the moral issue. I have given up in despair trying to persuade people on that issue.” This was a cunning statement, since while the thrust of Stokes’ argument was about the effectiveness of area bombing, he spent enough time discussing “the moral issue” to leave his fellow MPs in no doubt of his true position.⁵⁸⁶ Framing his argument around effectiveness “gave his arguments special strength: he supported his ethical position in part by referring to quite pragmatic considerations [how to deal with post-war Germany] that were

⁵⁸⁴ Russell, ‘Why Dresden Matters’, 164.

⁵⁸⁵ McKee, *Dresden 1945*, 265; Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, 502; Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 363.

⁵⁸⁶ Hansard (as above), Columns 1898-1900.

even then in the minds of Churchill and others.”⁵⁸⁷ Turning to the moral issue he claimed to leave out, he stated that “[o]ne reads the most ghastly stories of what is going on in Dresden”, before quoting at length from the *Manchester Guardian*, in which an article had appeared the previous day highlighting the extent of the damage in Dresden, and the fact that the population had been swelled by refugees.⁵⁸⁸ It was this article around which his argument was based, an article which will be discussed later in this chapter. His concerns are succinctly described by A. C. Grayling: “The city was known to be full of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the approach of the Soviet troops. Was this a reason to bomb the city? Why was it not, on humanitarian grounds, a reason not to bomb the city?”⁵⁸⁹ In spite of Stokes’ determination and his refusal to be fobbed off, he was unable to draw much support from his fellow MPs. After hearing the *Manchester Guardian* report, Sir Wavell Wakefield, MP for Swindon, could not understand Stokes’ argument. “If, as I understood the hon. Member to say, bombing was not much good, has he not just shown the value of this strategic bombing?”⁵⁹⁰ Indeed, it was not until much later that an official response was given to Stokes’ question. Sinclair’s deputy, the Joint Under-Secretary of State for Air, Commander Brabner, responded:

“We are not wasting our bombers or time on purely terror tactics....It does not do the hon. Member justice to come to this House and try to suggest that there are a lot of Air Marshals or pilots, or anyone else, sitting in a room, trying to think how many German women and children they can kill.”⁵⁹¹

Over five hours after Richard Stokes had first stood up to raise his question, the answer he received was a curt, swift denial. As Frederick Taylor wrote recently, “the debate ended in anticlimax. There would be no further formal discussion of the bombing question before the

⁵⁸⁷ Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 118-119.

⁵⁸⁸ Hansard (as above), Column 1899. The *Manchester Guardian* article is covered in greater detail in the section on newspapers.

⁵⁸⁹ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 260.

⁵⁹⁰ Hansard (as above), Column 1899.

⁵⁹¹ Hansard (as above), Columns 1989-1990.

war ended.”⁵⁹² For all Stokes’ bluster, he had been unable to occasion a substantial response, or even a debate, which drew in a large number of MPs. However, Sinclair’s departure from the House and the brusque nature of the eventual reply suggest Stokes had touched a nerve. His protestations that day left at least three positive legacies. First, he had ensured that his reservations over the Dresden attacks would be entered onto the public record. In particular, the major benefit was that the Cowan Dispatch – discussed below – was entered onto public record in Hansard. The dispatch had previously been suppressed from the public.⁵⁹³ Second, he had ensured that the anti-area-bombing views were aired in parliament in relation to the Dresden raid. A long-time opponent of the area bombing of Germany, he had vindicated his earlier concerns by quoting from the *Manchester Guardian* article on the devastation caused. Anticipating the controversy over Dresden which had just begun but would later erupt, Stokes argued: “I think that we shall live to rue the day we have done this and that, in many ways, it will stand for all time as a blot upon our escutcheon.”⁵⁹⁴ Third, his sustained questioning may have influenced Churchill’s late-March volte-face, when he backed away from responsibility for the Dresden raids. Frederick Taylor speculates: “Perhaps Stokes’s barbs in the House of Commons three weeks earlier had penetrated and festered beneath the prime ministerial skin.”⁵⁹⁵ Certainly the immediate adverse reaction to the Dresden attacks concerned Churchill, as he quickly sought a retreat from responsibility for the attacks. Stokes’ decision to so publically challenge the bombing of Dresden would leave a mark which helped set the stage for greater investigation in the post-war years.

For all they may have been coolly received, Stephen A. Garrett points out that Stokes’ protestations were prescient. He sensed the waning of relations between the Allies and the

⁵⁹² Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 364.

⁵⁹³ Biddle, ‘Wartime Reactions’, 113. The ‘Cowan Dispatch’ is covered in greater detail in the section below on newspapers.

⁵⁹⁴ Hansard (as above), Column 1901.

⁵⁹⁵ Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 376.

Soviet Union once the war ended. Foreseeing a propaganda coup for the Soviets, Stokes “noted that the Russians seemed to have avoided the policy of devastating whole cities and thus the obloquy that was likely to follow those who had pursued such a strategy once the war was over.”⁵⁹⁶ So it would prove, as on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, the Dresden bombing would later form a pillar of anti-Western propaganda.⁵⁹⁷ Stokes must also fit into Max Hastings’ class of “farsighted airmen and politicians [who] began to perceive that history might judge the achievements of strategic air power with far less enthusiasm than their own Target Intelligence departments.”⁵⁹⁸

Perhaps inevitably, much of the attention following the attacks fell upon Sir Arthur Harris. Harris was later unrepentant about the fate of Dresden. John Colville, Winston Churchill’s Assistant Private Secretary, offers evidence of Harris’ position. Colville recorded in his diary a discussion he had with Sir Arthur Harris the week after the Dresden raids. “Before dinner, while waiting in the Great Hall for the P.M. [sic] to come down, I asked Sir Arthur Harris what the effect of the raid on Dresden had been. “Dresden?” he said. “There is no such place as Dresden.””⁵⁹⁹ It was, argues Tami Davis Biddle, such sharp and dismissive attitudes which made Harris “an uncomfortable figure for those who daily had to consider public perception and opinion – including religious and humanitarian sentiment – in Britain.”⁶⁰⁰ John Ellis goes further: “Harris’s own pleadings on behalf of area bombing rarely smacked of intellectual rigour.”⁶⁰¹ Unwavering in the belief that he was pursuing the most effective bombing policy, Harris entered heated correspondence with Charles Portal, Marshal of the Royal Air Force. Portal felt that at this stage of the war the Allies should move away from the area bombing of cities and concentrate on targeting German oil plants: his correspondence with Portal is

⁵⁹⁶ Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 119.

⁵⁹⁷ Bill Niven, ‘The GDR and Memory of the Bombing of Dresden’ in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 113-127.

⁵⁹⁸ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 343.

⁵⁹⁹ Colville, *The Fringes of Power*, 562.

⁶⁰⁰ Biddle, T. D. ‘Wartime Reactions’ in Addison and Crang, *Firestorm*, 114.

⁶⁰¹ Ellis, *Brute Force*, 186.

discussed below. He encouraged Harris to do so but was met with a stern defence of area bombing.⁶⁰² After the war Harris became the figurehead of the Allied area bombing policy, and recognition of his wartime service was muted. Max Hastings suggests that it was Harris' behaviour at this time – steadfastly and angrily refusing to end the area bombing of German cities – that led to his relative ostracism in the post-war years. The policy of visiting mass destruction on the Reich at the end of the war, symbolised by Dresden, was beginning to affect opinions of Harris.⁶⁰³

The thoughts of Portal, along with those of Sir Archibald Sinclair, could be revealing here, yet it is not possible to give a clear picture for either man. Portal did not keep a diary during the period and there is very little of relevance in the papers of Sinclair which have survived. Portal's correspondence with Harris during late 1944 and early 1945 does though reveal his frustrations with Harris, who was convinced both by the inefficacy of the plan to target oil plants and in the absolute value in continuing to load maximum resources into the area bombing campaign. Portal did not intend for the area bombing of cities to cease, yet a letter written to Harris on 12th November suggested that the "magnetism" of the German cities still functioning was distracting Bomber Command from the primary targets. Portal urged Harris to "re-assure me that this is not so" and to confirm that oil objectives were being effectively targeted.⁶⁰⁴ Harris remained of the belief that wiping out oil plants serving the Nazi war machine was an unrealistic aim.⁶⁰⁵ Director of Bomber Operations Sydney Bufton wrote to Portal that Harris's argument "cannot be accepted" and Portal told Harris that he was "profoundly disappointed" by Harris's apparent rejection of the plan to target oil.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰² Probert, *Bomber Harris*, 308-311.

⁶⁰³ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 336. See also McKee, *Dresden 1945*, 310.

⁶⁰⁴ CCAC, Buft 3, 51, Portal to Harris, 12th November 1944.

⁶⁰⁵ See, for example, CCAC, BUFT 3, 51, Harris to Portal, 12th December 1944.

⁶⁰⁶ CCAC, BUFT 3, 51, Bufton to Portal, 21st December 1944 and Portal to Harris, 22nd December 1944.

On the moral questions surrounding the area bombing of German cities, Portal's private views are harder to pin down. In Denis Richards' biography of Portal he casts him as pragmatic on the question of German civilian deaths, and defends him against a charge of hypocrisy. Portal believed that cities should feel the weight of the bombing campaign without actively seeking to cause mass death of their inhabitants. "To many, bearing in mind the weight and fury of Bomber Command's attacks from 1942 onwards, this distinction may seem unreal, or even hypocritical. Portal, however, was least of all men a hypocrite."⁶⁰⁷

It is easier to fill in the role of Winston Churchill. Between 22 and 27 January correspondence between Churchill, Portal and Sinclair shows that Churchill was impatiently pushing for news of plans for a heavy attack on cities in the east of Germany which would be intended to both aid the Soviet advance and strike a severe blow against German civilian morale.⁶⁰⁸ It would give him, according to Addison, a "strengthen[ed] hand at the negotiating table"⁶⁰⁹ at the forthcoming Yalta Conference. At the time of the Dresden attacks, he was on his way back to Britain, via Athens, from the conference. He was in Athens when the attacks began. Colville explained that Churchill was not consulted about Dresden specifically, since "it was in accord with the general policy of bombing German towns massively", a policy Churchill had approved. The correspondence in late January places Churchill at the very centre of the push for an attack.⁶¹⁰ He goes on to describe the "apparent equanimity" with which his boss received the news about Dresden, adding that Churchill "never mentioned it in my presence, and I am reasonably sure he would have done so if it had been regarded as anything at all special."⁶¹¹ This seems to lend weight to the suggestion that Churchill's critical response to the Dresden attacks – not forthcoming until six weeks after the attack – was based less on his own prompt

⁶⁰⁷ Denis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford* (London: William Heinemann, 1977), xi, 166-167.

⁶⁰⁸ Taylor, *Dresden, Tuesday*, 209-211.

⁶⁰⁹ Addison, *Churchill*, 196.

⁶¹⁰ See, for example, Taylor, *Dresden, Tuesday*, 209-212, Overy, *The Bombing War*, 392,

⁶¹¹ Colville, 'Memoirs', 86, and Colville, *The Fringes of Power*, 562-563.

appraisal and more on the criticism which was quickly attached to the raids. It took him six weeks to reach the conclusion that Dresden should not have been attacked.⁶¹² Before this, the Prime Minister had been personally criticised for the raids. In the days following the attacks, Violet Bonham Carter, daughter of H. H. Asquith, who had served as Prime Minister during the First World War, rebuked Churchill. Having demanded to speak with him at Downing Street, she then “soundly berated the most powerful man in Britain for bombing Dresden.”⁶¹³ On 25th February a letter was sent to Churchill from an anonymous source in Germany which called on him to defeat Nazi Germany without bombing civilians.

“Dear Mr Churchill, you are a just man. Why do you vent your hatred on innocent people? Do a good work and free the world from the horrible Nazi Beast. God bless your work.”⁶¹⁴

Churchill’s official response to the bombings was not issued until the end of March. The effect these direct challenges to Churchill had on him cannot be proved with certainty. Yet as Maxwell Philip Schoenfeld writes: “Dresden now began to acquire that haunting position it has retained to the present day in the story of Churchill’s war ministry.”⁶¹⁵

At the end of March, with the outcome of the war increasingly certain, he drafted his oft-reproduced minute on the policy of area bombing, retrospectively withdrawing his support for the attacks. An initial draft was especially scathing of the attacks:

“It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. We shall not, for instance, be able to get housing materials out of Germany for our own needs because some temporary provision would have to be made for the Germans themselves. The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied

⁶¹² TNA: CAB 120/303, Churchill to Chiefs of Staff, 28th March 1945.

⁶¹³ Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 364.

⁶¹⁴ TNA: HW 1/2600, Letter to Churchill from Germany, unsigned. 25th February 1945.

⁶¹⁵ Schoenfeld, *The War Ministry*, 100. See also Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 256, and Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 34.

bombing. I am of the opinion that military objectives must henceforth be more strictly studied in our own interests rather than that of the enemy.

The Foreign Secretary has spoken to me on this subject, and I feel the need for more precise concentration upon military objectives, such as oil and communications behind the immediate battle-zone, rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive.”⁶¹⁶

The inflammatory tone of the first draft was changed after strong criticism from Portal yet still saw Churchill seek to distance himself from the decision to make such a destructive raid:

“It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of the so called “area bombing” of German cities should be reviewed from the point of view of our own interests. If we come into control of an entirely ruined land, there will be a great shortage of accommodation for ourselves and our Allies: and we shall be unable to get housing materials out of Germany for our own needs because some temporary provision would have to be made for the Germans themselves. We must see to it that our attacks do not do more harm to ourselves in the long run than they do to the enemy’s immediate war effort. Pray let me have your views.”⁶¹⁷

Stephen A. Garrett notes that:

“Churchill, after all, knew full well what area bombing had meant for Germany, even if most of his countrymen had not, and one day the actual historical record would be open for inspection. Churchill, with his historian’s instincts, presumably was preparing for this eventuality.”⁶¹⁸

Clement Attlee had also noted this aspect of Churchill’s character – his “intense realisation of history” – during the war. In a letter to his brother he describes Churchill’s thought-process in the same way as Garrett suggests. “He sees all events as taking place in the procession of past events as seen by the historian of the future”.⁶¹⁹ Attlee himself seemed largely unmoved by the destruction across Germany during a visit to mainland Europe in March 1945. His focus, in a letter to his brother, was on the lack of architectural loss the bombing had caused. Most of

⁶¹⁶ TNA: CAB 120/303, Churchill to Chiefs of Staff, 28th March 1945.

⁶¹⁷ TNA: CAB 120/303, Churchill to Chiefs of Staff, 1st April 1945. On Portal’s response see Richards, *Portal of Hungerford*, 187, 192.

⁶¹⁸ Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 34.

⁶¹⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library: [MS.Eng. c. 4793, fol. 2]. 21st November 1941.

the houses were, he wrote, “pretentious florid affairs with caryatids etc very German [sic].”⁶²⁰ The lack of any sustained engagement with the morality of bombing by those at the very top of British command during the war may indicate a number of factors; the intention to avoid the creation of a paper-trail to be picked up after the war fits the descriptions of Churchill’s historical instincts. For his own part Churchill did little to dispel this suggestion either during or in the years after the war, a point for which he is criticised by biographers. Churchill’s vast history of the Second World War gives minimal attention to the Dresden raids particularly; on the wider Bomber Offensive, Paul Addison describes Churchill’s treatment of it as “oblique and inadequate”;⁶²¹ David Reynolds writes that Churchill “glosses over the bomber offensive and the criticisms of it”;⁶²² Norman Rose suggests that the details of the Dresden raids “seemed to have slipped Churchill’s memory.”⁶²³ Evidence to support this latter point comes in the form of a response Churchill gave when asked to clarify some factual points. “I cannot recall anything about it. I thought the Americans did it. Air Chief Marshal Harris would be the person to contact.”⁶²⁴ Reynolds does note that when Churchill wrote volume four of his history of the Second World War he did not yet have a dedicated air war researcher, and suggests that this contributed to the “piecemeal” way in which the area bombing campaign was addressed.⁶²⁵ Addison argues that the alteration of the minute is “a matter for speculation”.⁶²⁶ Geoffrey Best concludes, similarly, that with regards to the position of Churchill on the bombing of German cities: “each reader must judge for himself.”⁶²⁷

Sir Arthur Harris issued his memoirs in 1947. He offered little other than factual description of the Dresden raids. Where he did engage with the questions as to the morality of the attacks,

⁶²⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library [MS.Eng. c. 4793, fol. 3]. Clement Attlee to Thomas Attlee, 15th March 1945.

⁶²¹ Addison, *Churchill*, 197.

⁶²² Reynolds, *In Command of History*, 320-323.

⁶²³ Rose, *Churchill*, 274-275.

⁶²⁴ Quoted in Rose, *Churchill*, 338.

⁶²⁵ Reynolds, *In Command of History*, 320-323.

⁶²⁶ Addison, *Churchill*, 197.

⁶²⁷ Best, *Churchill*, 242.

he was brief. Acknowledging those people who had supported other bombing missions but condemned the Dresden attacks, he stated that the latter were “at the time considered a military necessity by much more important people than myself.” The unshaded implication here is that Harris was acting with the approval of his bosses. Harris added that his arguments on the ethics of bombing – that civilians had always been killed in wars – should be applied to Dresden as to any other city targeted in the war. The soundness of this argument has undergone rigorous testing, and can be criticised since the attacks occurred at a time when the war was approaching its end. In any case, Harris, like Churchill, offered little of a substantial nature for critics to discuss at this stage.⁶²⁸ In the early 1960s, around the time of the release of the Official History, Harris wrote a seven page rebuttal of the idea that he – and he alone – was responsible for the decision to attack Dresden. His note begins: “I have no intention, as at present indicated, of going down to History as the author or the sole executant of the Strategical plans to destroy the cities of Germany.” Harris outlined the chain of command within which decisions were taken, confirmed that the standard checks of operational orders had taken place, and described Portal’s “preponderating influence over bombing strategy”. He went on claim that the plan to bomb Dresden “of course [came] from the other side of the Iron Curtain”, a suggestion which Overy firmly rejects.⁶²⁹

Paul Addison asked recently what we now know about Dresden, and what we know because of Dresden. He notes that one of the main legacies of the attacks was to undermine the credibility of those who made it happen: “If the attack on Dresden inflicted little in the way of military damage on the enemy, it caused lasting damage to the reputation of Britain and the United States, not to mention the airmen and politicians who took the key decisions.”⁶³⁰ Churchill’s actions and response to the Dresden attack have damaged his legacy. Conversely,

⁶²⁸ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, 176-177, 242.

⁶²⁹ RAFM: Arthur Travers Harris Papers, H136, ‘Notes on Bomber Command’, [n.d; Overy dates this 1961 or 1962].

⁶³⁰ Addison, ‘Retrospect’, 218.

those who questioned and condemned the raids at the time emerge with reputations enhanced and helped ensure that the attack has been subjected to sustained scrutiny.⁶³¹ John Colville, whose diary has been quoted here, reflected on the reaction to the Dresden raids in a later publication. He suggested that, with respect to Churchill's initial acceptance of the attacks, "the accumulated horrors of the war hardened all our hearts".⁶³² As evidence in a previous chapter shows, before the war Churchill was, at least in his public pronouncements, against area bombing as a policy.⁶³³ If we accept Colville's analysis, and it seems reasonable to do so, we can understand that the years of war and the failure to finish off the German war effort had taken their toll on many of those in power. This resulted in the administering of a brutal attack on a largely untouched city in the very late stages of the war. Even after more than five years of war, there remained a determined few who were not afflicted with the hardened hearts Colville diagnoses.

Press responses

An example of relative censorship dynamics in the United States and the United Kingdom can be displayed with reference to the 'Cowan Dispatch' – mentioned by Richard Stokes in his address to parliament – on the Dresden bombings. Frederick Taylor explains how this episode was played out. RAF Air Commodore Colin McKay Grierson advised a press conference of the reasons for the raids on Dresden and other cities targeted at the same time. One of the reasons he stated was that "they are the centres to which evacuees are being moved." In response to further questioning on this, Grierson added, in the words of Taylor, "a fairly offhand remark about also trying to destroy "what was left of German morale.""⁶³⁴ The Cowan Dispatch refers to a report submitted the following day by Howard Cowan of the Associated

⁶³¹ McKee, *Dresden 1945*, 265.

⁶³² Colville, 'Memoirs', 86.

⁶³³ Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 44.

⁶³⁴ Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 361-362.

Press. It stated: "Allied air commanders have made the long-awaited decision to adopt deliberate terror bombing of German population centers as a ruthless expedient to hastening Hitler's doom." This report was quickly suppressed in Britain but gained greater traction in the United States. Without the rapid transfer and exchange of information now available this information was not widely known in Britain. It was certainly not published in British newspapers. This story is a firm reminder of the high censorial controls applied to British newspapers and begins to explain the block on relaying the kind of information that would lead to direct questioning of wartime policy.⁶³⁵ Yet in spite of the strict controls, there are numerous examples of passages which were deemed acceptable by censors and which appear critical of the Dresden raids. Stuart Allan describes how during the war "the BBC succumbed to pressures which severely compromised its editorial independence. No such restrictions were requested *vis-à-vis* the newspaper press, nor would their imposition likely to have proven to be successful."⁶³⁶ This greater strength of editorial independence allowed some more critical reports to go to press. This was not the rule however, with many newspapers focusing on the military significance of such a heavy attack. Plenty of reports explained the scale of "the greatest air offensive of the war", details of which were "expected to show that it was a record."⁶³⁷ In the Coventry local press the reporting is factual and draws no similarities with the experiences of citizens in the two cities: neither celebration nor empathy is apparent.⁶³⁸ Since the first attacks took place late on the night of 13th February, the first newspapers to run the story were the evening editions of 14th February. It was not until the following morning that there was full coverage of the raids. This section of the chapter will show how newspapers

⁶³⁵ Quoted in Biddle, 'Wartime Reactions', 106. See also Probert, *Bomber Harris*, 321, and Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 361-362.

⁶³⁶ Stuart Allan, *News Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 36.

⁶³⁷ *Daily Herald*, '9,000-plane attacks on cities, troops, supplies'. 15th February 1945, 1; *Daily Worker*, 'Record day blitz over Reich'. 15th February 1945, 1.

⁶³⁸ See for example *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 'First major R.A.F. raid on Dresden'. 14th February 1945, 8; *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 'Another big air blow at Germany'. 15th February 1945, 1.

did ask implicit questions of the attacks, in spite of both censorship levels and of the general trend followed by other media outlets to faithfully report, not question.

Cecil H. King, a senior executive at the *Daily Mirror*, wrote his reaction to the Cowan Dispatch in his diary on 17th February, describing Allied terror bombing as “entirely horrifying.” He added that it was “wicked as well as being typically un-British.” Prophetically, he added: “I cannot help feeling that the price, political and moral, we shall have to pay for all this will be a grievous one.” The effect this had on his newspaper’s reporting of the raids was that they “rang up the Ministry of Information as soon as the news came in, to urge that it be suppressed – a very forlorn hope – and in any case did not print it.” A few weeks later King added that “[t]he destruction of Germany is quite awful, and I am afraid I am far more appalled by the prospect of rebuilding a prostrate Europe than elated at the idea of victory.”⁶³⁹ One man’s moral outrage though did not lead to the wider distribution of information about the attacks: quite the reverse in King’s case. Martin Bell has since speculated upon the effect of showing the British public the true extent of the Dresden attacks. He considers the hypothetical response to Hamburg and Dresden in an age of satellite television reporting, and questioned whether such attacks: “would have been politically sustainable, or whether the tens of thousands of civilian casualties and the images beamed up from the smoking ruins would have turned the home front against the prosecution of war by such ruthless and brutal means.”⁶⁴⁰ Similarly, perhaps if Cecil King’s disgust at the Allies’ tactics had translated into a more critical stance in his newspaper’s reporting, more people would have turned against this manifestation of the bombing offensive. It is noticeable in studying the archives of the *Daily Mirror* that it does not make any mention of the negative side of the Dresden raids. Articles reporting the raids discuss the facts and figures of the attacks, such as the number of planes

⁶³⁹ King, *With Malice Toward None*, 290-291.

⁶⁴⁰ Martin Bell, *Through Gates of Fire: A Journey Into World Disorder* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 35-36.

involved and the number of bombs dropped.⁶⁴¹ The aforementioned censorship controls prevented newspapers overtly criticising the attacks. Yet there is ample evidence of reportage which would prompt more astute readers to ask questions of the raids. The case of the *Manchester Guardian* discussed below is a prime example of how a newspaper was able to raise concerns without directly criticising Bomber Command. Such an approach might have enabled King to acknowledge his “horror” while presenting sympathetic readers with cues for further enquiry.

The *Daily Mail* headline of 16th February described Dresden as it was for the people there – a shelter. With the Bomber Offensive producing widespread destruction across the Reich, there were few population centres of any size which remained virtually intact. Dresden was one such area, and Germans who had lost their homes in other cities had converged in the town. Where many of the newspapers concentrated on the reasons given by the Allies for attacking Dresden, the *Daily Mail*’s angle: “The last ‘shelter’ cities go”, very much evokes images of those who were there at the time.⁶⁴² The most obvious and widely used example of sensitive reporting is the consistent line taken by the *Manchester Guardian*. The report of 5th March 1945, as mentioned previously in connection with Richard Stokes’ protestations, and discussed further below, is well known. Yet the initial report is stark, especially by comparison to the *Daily Herald*, *Daily Worker*, and *Daily Mirror* articles quoted above. Early in their article of 15th February is the following passage: “An Air Ministry communiqué said that the R.A.F. went to Dresden twice on Tuesday night. Both attacks were highly concentrated and large fires were left burning.” This employs more descriptive language than the reports stating numbers and figures, and sets the scene for what follows. The final line of the article notes that “Dresden’s pre-war population of 640,000 has been swollen by thousands of evacuees from much-

⁶⁴¹ See for example *Daily Mirror*, ‘Germany’s worst air blitz’. 15th February 1945, 1; and *Daily Mirror*, ‘Allied bombers pave way for the Red Army’. 16th February 1945, 1.

⁶⁴² *Daily Mail*, ‘The last ‘shelter’ cities go’. 16th February 1945, 1.

bombed German cities.” This was the only article to make explicit mention of the refugees in the city.⁶⁴³

In *The Times*, the reports filed in the editions of 15th and 16th February 1945 show nothing to suggest that the raids were morally questionable.⁶⁴⁴ However, in an editorial on the 16th, the editors indicated a greater level of concern. As with the *Manchester Guardian* report, the language used is telling. Describing a surprising lack of response to the air raids by the Germans, the editorial explained that the explanations for this “derive from the unprecedented fury of the onslaught from the air, which of late has fallen upon Germany continuously by day and night.” Rather than exult in the increasing level of attacks on the enemy, this phase was described as “a new and terrifying prodigy of air power.”⁶⁴⁵ In the first chapter of this thesis there is a quote from Daniel Waley about the British public appetite for news of foreign affairs being whetted by the Italian actions in Abyssinia.⁶⁴⁶ Here, this more critical response to the bombings, according to Tami Davis Biddle, would have alerted “perceptive readers” to the characteristics and implications that the bombing campaign would now take on. She continues: “In key respects, the Combined Bomber Offensive had become different from previous years. Both British and American raids were, at this point in the war, unprecedented in their size and sustained fury.”⁶⁴⁷ *The Times* appears to have picked up on this, and relayed the development to their readers.

The *Daily Sketch* was another newspaper to quickly understand the extent of the devastation in Dresden. In their front-page article on the subject on 15th February, the newspaper described how “Germany has taken the worst scourging of the war from the air on her cities,

⁶⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Triple raid on Dresden’. 15th February 1945, 1.

⁶⁴⁴ *The Times*, ‘Smashing blows at Dresden’. 15th February 1945, 4; and *The Times*, ‘14,000 tons on Germany’. 16th February 1945, 4.

⁶⁴⁵ *The Times*, ‘The air assault’. 16th February 1945, 5.

⁶⁴⁶ Waley, *British Public Opinion*, 136-138.

⁶⁴⁷ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 255.

railway centres, troop concentrations and supply lines.” This line is fairly standard in terms of how the most newspapers were handling the attacks. What followed however is perhaps the most poetic description of the raids to be found in any paper. In bold type, the following passage appeared. “Into a sea of fire spread by a cascade of 650,000 incendiaries the bombers poured hundreds of “block-busting” 8,000lb. and 4,000lb. high explosive bombs.”⁶⁴⁸ The *Daily Sketch* backed up this article with another, in which the author quoted extensively from the “one prompt, comprehensive, and factual report at this stage of what had happened in Dresden”, which was written by Rudolph Sparing of the German Overseas News Agency (GONA).⁶⁴⁹ This second article is the most explicit of the first wave of reports in terms of what it told the British public about the raids. “The Dresden catastrophe is without precedent. In the inner town not a single block of buildings, not a single detached building, remain intact or even capable of reconstruction. The town area is devoid of life.” This was a direct quote from the GONA, which added that “[a] great city has been wiped off the map of Europe.” There followed an explicit description of the effects of the raids. “The raging fires which spread irresistibly in the narrow streets killed a great many from sheer lack of oxygen.” The quotes reproduced here make up the majority of the article. Only the opening line, introducing the German report, was not a direct translation. There was no comment, propaganda, or mediation by *Daily Sketch* editorial staff. Other newspapers, when quoting from German news sources, tended to temper the reports with qualifications. Take for example the following passage from the *Daily Express*. “The Germans went on to complain of the loss of art treasures and beautiful buildings. But the truth is that Dresden is a major city in the German war effort.”⁶⁵⁰ This article was similar in source material to the *Daily Sketch* report. The *Daily Express* qualified what they wrote with more Allied-friendly background information. The *Daily*

⁶⁴⁸ *Daily Sketch*, ‘Germany gets worst air scourging yet’. 15th February 1945, 1.

⁶⁴⁹ Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker From the Crimea to Iraq* (London: André Deutsch, 2003), 343-344.

⁶⁵⁰ *Daily Express*, ‘Dresden ‘bombed to atoms’’. 16th February 1945, 1.

Sketch allowed a German voice to be heard without an Allied perspective being played over the top. An almost identical translation from the original German line beginning “[t]he raging fires...” appeared later in the *Manchester Guardian*, to greater fanfare (see below), but it was the *Daily Sketch* which first chose to run this version of events.

Later, on 5th March, the *Manchester Guardian* printed the most explicit and substantial description of the conditions created in Dresden by the raids. This would prove to be a critical event in the reaction to Dresden, for it provided ammunition for Richard Stokes to use in the House of Commons. The *Manchester Guardian* was now informing government. It is as a result of Stokes quoting from the article during a Commons debate that the gruesome details can be found on parliamentary records in Britain. The article was based on a German report, but the editors did not seek to undermine the report by dismissing it as a propaganda tool. The article stated:

“Tens of thousands who lived in Dresden are now burned under its ruins. Even an attempt at identification of the victims is hopeless. What happened on that evening of February 13th? There were 1,000,000 people in Dresden, including 600,000 bombed-out evacuees and refugees from the East. The raging fires which spread irresistibly in the narrow streets killed a great many from sheer lack of oxygen.”⁶⁵¹

For the first time in the British newspapers, the effect of the fires on the residents of Dresden were fully explained. Although the early reports of the attacks told of the fires raging in the town, none made the explicit link between this situation and how it would affect the people. Shrewd readers may have made the link, but here for the first time was a proper description of what went on. Prior to this, the average reader of newspapers in Britain could not unreasonably have believed that the effect of the fires had been to destroy bricks and mortar rather than flesh and blood. This raid was not comparable to what had been experienced in British cities. The same newspaper had previously revealed that the population of the town

⁶⁵¹ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Dresden wiped out’. 5th March 1945, 6.

had increased due to the stream of refugees bursting out of the increasingly bombed out cities of Germany. This point was reinforced in the article.⁶⁵² Whether the quoted figures were correct or not is open to discussion, with the Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels thought to have had a hand in manipulations of the official story.⁶⁵³ Nevertheless, that Dresden had become something of a 'shelter city' is unarguable. This was transmitted to British readers by the *Manchester Guardian* article. What followed however was more shocking, as the text described the manner in which a great number of the town's occupants had died. "The raging fires which spread irresistibly in the narrow streets killed a great many from sheer lack of oxygen." As if the idea of citizens burning to death was not graphic and appalling enough, readers were now told that suffocation acted as a multiplier of the death toll.⁶⁵⁴ More recent research has uncovered further dreadful ways in which people in Dresden had met their deaths. Metal bomb shelters acted as ovens which cooked their occupants. Sönke Neitzel has described how those who sought to escape the firestorm by immersing themselves in water tanks for use by fire crews were boiled alive. People wearing loose shoes soon lost them to the chaos underfoot, and found they were quickly unable to walk as their feet became too badly burned.⁶⁵⁵ The details described in the *Manchester Guardian* so soon after the attacks have become just a part of the narrative of widespread horror visited upon civilians in Dresden. The article played an important role at the time however, since it pried open a window through which British people could view the chaos and devastation experienced in the hours and days following the raids.⁶⁵⁶

The very fact that the *Manchester Guardian* article was published three weeks after the attacks is revealing. Elsewhere, other stories became the focus of media attention, such as the

⁶⁵² *Manchester Guardian*, 'Dresden wiped out'. 5th March 1945, 6.

⁶⁵³ Addison, 'Retrospect', 211.

⁶⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Dresden wiped out'. 5th March 1945, 6.

⁶⁵⁵ Sönke Neitzel, 'The City Under Attack' in Addison and Crang, *Firestorm*, 70-73.

⁶⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Dresden wiped out'. 5th March 1945, 6.

continuing advance of the Red Army, and developments in the Pacific theatre of war.⁶⁵⁷ The appearance of a supplementary report on the state of Dresden three weeks later displays not only the scale of the damage caused, but also the fact that it was still considered newsworthy. As with Mannheim and Hamburg before it, Dresden was becoming a reference point in the bomber offensive on Germany. By this stage, newspapers could confidently report that Dresden had been destroyed without adding further information. On 6th March, reports were filed telling of the bombing of Chemnitz, another eastern German city. The *Daily Express* described Chemnitz as being “near “obliterated” Dresden”. This shows how quickly the state of the town post-Allied bombing had become widely known in Britain.⁶⁵⁸

Looking back years after the war, journalist Charles Lynch described his profession during the war as playing a “cheerleading” role. “We were a propaganda arm of our governments. At the start the censors enforced that, but by the end we were our own censors.”⁶⁵⁹ Applying this observation to the newspaper reporting of the Dresden raids, this can explain the response of those newspapers which ran with stories of a “[r]ecord day blitz” amounting to the “war’s greatest air offensive”.⁶⁶⁰ Alan Russell describes the “prevarication” of the media.⁶⁶¹ Yet this chapter has shown that Lynch is overly critical of the role played by journalists as a whole. The *Daily Sketch*, *The Times*, and the *Manchester Guardian* are all notable examples of newspapers which gave an immediate indication of the scale of the attacks on Dresden. In more recent years hindsight has led to a broader range of more overt criticism of the raids. However, those journalists and editors who ran the more sensitive reports – while Dresden’s fires still burned and charred bodies still lay decomposing in the streets – used not hindsight to raise implicit

⁶⁵⁷ See for example *The Times*, ‘Red Armies massing’. 23rd February 1945, 4; *Daily Sketch*, ‘Tokyo battle still raging’. 17th February 1945, 1.

⁶⁵⁸ *Daily Express*, ‘Chemnitz heavy hit last night’. 6th March 1945, 1.

⁶⁵⁹ Quoted in Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 364.

⁶⁶⁰ *Daily Worker*, ‘Record day blitz over Reich’. 15th February 1945, 1; *Daily Express*, ‘Great Rhine-Dresden blitz’. 15th February 1945. p. 1.

⁶⁶¹ Russell, ‘Why Dresden Matters’, 165.

questions about Dresden, but their immediate sense of concern. By electing to print such reports the information was made available to the wider British public.

Public responses

It is important to reemphasise here the focus on contemporary sources, particularly for this specific aspect of the thesis. By April in Britain knowledge of Nazi atrocities in concentration and extermination camps was becoming more widespread, particularly after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen by British troops. There was only a brief period between when the assault on Dresden began on 13th February 1945, and when the discoveries of the concentration camps started to feature heavily in the media.⁶⁶² This had a hardening effect on British public opinion. As Grayling writes: "For many in this mood, the area bombing in general and the destruction of Dresden in particular seemed no more than just punishment."⁶⁶³ A file report for Mass-Observation in April produced evidence of a good deal of angry and unsympathetic views towards Germans. These views form the vast majority. The commonalities of experience during the Blitz and the simultaneous bombing of German cities which were a feature of attitudes to reprisals earlier in the war were certainly not widely reflected upon here. Mass-Observation had asked how Germany and Germans should be treated once the war was over. One person said: "I think this: the children should be taken out of the country, and we ought to turn their gas-bombs on them and exterminate them." Another stated: "They're to blame. The only innocent ones are those found in the concentration camps." One person answered: "I hate every single one of them."⁶⁶⁴ Yet even now among a minority, enduring empathy was in

⁶⁶² See for example *Manchester Guardian*, 'Notorious concentration camp records discovered'. 16th April 1945, 1; *The Times*, 'Camp of death and misery'. 16th April 1945, 3.

⁶⁶³ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 73. See also D. C. Watt, *Britain Looks to Germany: British Opinion and Policy Towards Germany Since 1945* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1965), 115; Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 369-370.

⁶⁶⁴ M-O A: FR 2228, 'Special pre-peace news questionnaire'. April 1945. Responses of F30C, M30C and F18C.

evidence, albeit in qualified form. One person wrote: “The older ones are much like ourselves; the younger ones have been brought up to this idea of complete domination. But there are many kind and nice Germans of course.” This idea of an intoxicated generation was echoed by another person surveyed: “I think they had no alternative but to follow their leaders.” One man said simply: “Well, I should say the German people are like us.”⁶⁶⁵

Unfortunately the BIPO surveys for this period of the war have not survived; it is therefore difficult to convey an impression of the extent of public support or discomfort around the bombing of Germany and how it compared to when Hamburg was attacked. There is though still much which can be derived from Mass-Observation diary entries around this time.

As the previous section on newspaper coverage has shown, there were a substantial number of written reports that ought to have enabled observant readers to gather that there was a contentious issue unfolding over the destruction of Dresden. The questions raised – often implicitly – in newspaper articles were transferred into visible disapproval of the Dresden attacks. As elsewhere, this section should not be read in such a way as to suggest that the attacks received widespread and outspoken condemnation. Simon Garfield offers the example of Pam Ashford, a diarist who in the same year had already come to value a swift victory over the fate of towns in Germany where she had developed fond relationships through her business dealings. She admitted that “[t]here is even indifference in my feelings for Duisburg and Dresden, though there real personal friendships existed.”⁶⁶⁶ This was long before the Allies destroyed Dresden. In February 1945 there was not a mass outpouring of rage over the destruction of Dresden. This lack of widespread public condemnation of the raids led Juliet Gardiner to write recently that to some people, the attacks were “confirmatory evidence of

⁶⁶⁵ FR 2228, as above. Responses of F25B, M50D and M35C.

⁶⁶⁶ Simon Garfield, *We Are At War: The Diaries of Five Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times* (London: Random House, 2005), 380.

the 'sickening' nature of war and raised little adverse comment at the time."⁶⁶⁷ Yet to accept this proposition is to ignore the thoughts of those people who did immediately question the raids. In amongst the statements of direct vengeance or indifference to the German fate, what is revealing are the views of people who did condemn the raids even after more than five years of war and with the newer threat posed by V-weapon attacks.⁶⁶⁸

In diaries kept for the Mass-Observation Archive there is a regular instance of diarists singling out and recording their thoughts on Dresden without prompt. This is telling in itself, even before examining the nature of those thoughts. From the responses gathered it is clear that the Dresden attacks touched a particular element of the public consciousness.

Even where there is no obvious criticism or sadness at the destruction of Dresden, a large number of diarists do mention the attacks in their entries. Clearly this was an event recognised by members of the public as a key development. This is especially true of male diarists, who often commented on Dresden while giving little in the way of opinion about it. Diarist 5004 exemplifies this phenomenon. His diary entries in mid-February offer comment on the possibility that the Dresden attacks were a product of negotiations at Yalta, and the Russian advance over land.⁶⁶⁹ There is no evidence of a moral argument being advanced. There is a greater trend for female diarists to offer more personal responses to the devastation wrought.

Another trait observable in the diaries of men is the echoing of the style and tone used by press reports. For example, Diarist 5132, a buyer in his late thirties, describes the "terrific hammerings" with which the Air Forces had hit Germany. This mirrors the almost bombastic language employed in some of the more sensational reporting from the region. He also follows the style of reporting which portrayed a ruined landscape that had been reduced to a pre-

⁶⁶⁷ Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline, 2004), 563-564.

⁶⁶⁸ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 340.

⁶⁶⁹ M-O A: D 5004, diary for 14th, 16th February 1945.

civilised state. In one entry he writes: “Dresden seems to have been absolutely liquidated in a matter of some 40 hours or so”.⁶⁷⁰ This is in keeping with newspaper reports that used the terms “smashed to atoms”, “pulverised”, and “completely wiped out”. His recording of the bombing is mostly framed in terms of strategic considerations; the only minor note he makes which does not fit this pattern is: “the Huns must be feeling pretty mad about it.”⁶⁷¹

When studying the entries made particularly by women in their diaries, it is clear there was much angst about the demise of Dresden. As Tami Davis Biddle and Max Hastings have explained, Dresden would have been known to a section of the British public prior to the war. The responses therefore often contain a clue suggesting that the diarist had visited the city. “Educated Britons knew it mainly for its cultural life and its fine examples of Baroque architecture”, according to Davis.⁶⁷² Hastings adds that “Dresden was a city of which an important section of educated Englishmen had heard, read, even seen.”⁶⁷³ Accepting that Dresden was a city viewed with a level of fondness by a proportion of the British public, it is possible to understand the following entry in these terms. Diarist 5272, a sixty-year-old musician and farm worker, described the city as being “of singular charm”. She goes on to frame this observation with descriptions of the beauty of the surrounding area. This makes it clear that she had either visited the city, or was aware of it in some other way. She opens her thoughts on the subject with the contention that “[p]oor Dresden got a fearful dose”.⁶⁷⁴ Diarist 5338, a civil servant of similar age to Diarist 5272, framed her lamentations along the same lines. Of Dresden she wrote: “I know it has to be because of its industrial and traffic importance. But it is such a beautiful city and I have so many happy memories of it.” Two days later she added “The News today is of large scale air war over Germany and Japan. I can’t help

⁶⁷⁰ M-O A: D 5132, diary for 16th February 1945.

⁶⁷¹ *Daily Express*, ‘Dresden ‘bombed to atoms’’. 16th February 1945, 1; *Daily Mail*, ‘Terror rule for all Germans’. 17th February 1945, 1; *Daily Sketch*, ‘Dresden wiped off the map’. 15th February 1945, 3.

⁶⁷² Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 256

⁶⁷³ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 342.

⁶⁷⁴ M-O A: D 5272, diary for February 1945.

feeling very grieved over Dresden, which they say is practically wiped out.”⁶⁷⁵ Evidently this diarist fitted into the class described above by Davis and Hastings. What is clear from these entries and those which follow is that a number of Mass-Observation volunteers knew of the cultural importance of Dresden. “Many people knew that boasting of the destruction of Dresden, sometimes known as the Florence of Germany, was like rejoicing that York or Cambridge had been obliterated.”⁶⁷⁶ Diarist 5390, a foreign shipping correspondent, had another reason to be especially saddened by the bombing of Dresden. One of her diary entries shows that she had an acquaintance from the city. “Dresden occurs often to me as Johanna’s home.” Unlike Pam Ashford, she had not grown indifferent to the fate of a city that it seems she had visited in the past: “I am sorry that such beautiful buildings are being destroyed. I have many photos of them.”⁶⁷⁷ One diary that is particularly revealing is that of Diarist 5337, a housewife from Oxfordshire. In her diary she concentrates broadly on her daily life, rarely mentioning events occurring in the war. This gives a rich picture of everyday life in Britain during the war. Yet the Dresden raids must have had a particular effect on her. As with other diarists, she implies that she has visited the city. In amongst descriptions of her daily routine, she mentions with regret the damage caused. “They have bombed the Opera House and lovely picture gallery at Dresden, so many happy memories I can recall.”⁶⁷⁸ The fact that she knew about the raids shows that she was aware of current affairs. While she rarely mentioned developments in the war, the Dresden bombings moved her sufficiently to record them in her diary. Due either to her previous experience of the city or her feeling that this was something above the ordinary, or perhaps a combination of the both factors, the attacks on Dresden stood out.

⁶⁷⁵ M-O A: D 5338, diary for 14th and 16th February 1945.

⁶⁷⁶ Longmate, *The Bombers*, 345.

⁶⁷⁷ M-O A: D 5390, diary for 16th February 1945.

⁶⁷⁸ M-O A: D 5337, diary for 16th February 1945.

Donald Bloxham has written, “while the assessment of the value of cultural loss is a relative one, the human loss is, or should be, absolute.” The examples above suggest that some diarists either felt the architectural and cultural loss more keenly than the inevitable human cost, or perhaps could not bring themselves to directly contemplate the massive civilian casualties.⁶⁷⁹ One question raised by the sadness over the loss of buildings is elucidated by A. C. Grayling in his examination of the Allied bombing policy. He rhetorically asks: “was there a half-spoken intent on the part of the Allies...to effect what would be called ‘culturecide’ upon the two main Axis powers?”⁶⁸⁰ The examples provided above of people who lamented the structural damage at Dresden point to a fear of this. The incidence of relegating the human cost is not, however, common to all Mass-Observation diarists. The aforementioned Diarist 5272, for example, was troubled by “the misery that all this is causing to millions of people – many of them innocent and perhaps even in opposition to the Nazis doesn’t bear thinking about. [sic]”⁶⁸¹ By the end of February, Diarist 5296, a housewife of a similar age, noted that: “[w]e wonder how on earth there is a town or person left alive.”⁶⁸² These examples show a genuine concern for the German civilians and refugees in Dresden at the time of the attacks. The opinion of Diarist 5283, a nurse companion in her late fifties, mirrors many of those replies to the December 1943 Mass-Observation directive which saw the bombing as a grim necessity. She writes about the regular attacks: “I found it rather sickening, necessary as it is if the war is to be won.”⁶⁸³ Diarist 5338 takes this point further: “War news continues very cheering. But I can’t help being sorry about the bombing of Dresden.” This lament about Dresden is explicitly set against the diarist’s evident pleasure at the wider progress of the war.

⁶⁷⁹ Bloxham, ‘Dresden as a War Crime’, 206. This phenomenon is also observable in, for instance, Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 89. See also Dervla Murphy, *Silverland: A Winter Journey Beyond the Urals* (London: John Murray, 2006), 1. Murphy considers the moral question over the relative importance of protecting – and tragedy of losing – civilians and cultural treasures.

⁶⁸⁰ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 22.

⁶⁸¹ M-O A: D 5272, diary for February 1945.

⁶⁸² M-O A: D 5296, diary for ‘The last days of Feb’.

⁶⁸³ M-O A: D 5283, diary for 14th February 1945.

The evidence used above shows examples of people upset by the effects of the raids. This concern is the common thread which links the contributors who were sad at the loss of particular cultural treasures with those whose unease or alarm centred on the loss of human life. There were however other reasons that diarists used to criticise or question the raids. Diarist 5403, a librarian in her early twenties, doubted whether the raids would affect the Germans' will to continue fighting, whatever physical damage was caused. "Germany's getting a terrific pasting from the air; this may have the desired psychological effect, but I don't think so."⁶⁸⁴ After all, British morale had not collapsed during the Blitz in 1940 and 1941. "[W]hat is remembered as the spirit of the Blitz could and did prevail even in the most shattered circumstances."⁶⁸⁵ While the extent of this 'Blitz spirit' has been debated, certainly there was no overwhelming societal breakdown in London or Coventry in the aftermath of large bombing raids.⁶⁸⁶ This diarist seems to have picked up on what a good deal of those in positions of power could not; that if British morale could not be broken by aerial bombardment, there was no reason to believe that this would be any different in towns and cities across Germany. Recent work by Donald Bloxham offers support for this proposition: that the Dresden raids were far more effective in inflicting physical damage than they were in denting morale. "The balance of the specialist historiography on the subject suggests that the area bombing strategy was not successful in demoralising the German population into opposing the Nazi regime".⁶⁸⁷ John Keegan is also supportive of Diarist 5403's suggestion, when he hints at a galvanising effect that Allied bombing may have had. He notes that the level of destruction in Dresden ensured that it "did not begin to function again until after the war was over", but adds that the Allies were unable to bomb the German civilian population into submission. "Nothing better

⁶⁸⁴ M-O A: D 5403, diary for 15th February 1945.

⁶⁸⁵ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 34. See also Mackay, *Half the Battle*, 8-9, for a discussion of the recent historiography of the 'Blitz spirit'.

⁶⁸⁶ See for example Gardiner, *The Blitz*, 324-330.

⁶⁸⁷ Bloxham, 'Dresden as a War Crime', 203.

vindicated the German people's reputation for discipline and hardihood than the resilience of their urban men and women under Allied air attack in 1943-5".⁶⁸⁸

There is another conclusion to be drawn from analysing these diary entries together. They seem to show a slight change in mood from the diary entries and directive responses discussed in the previous chapter. Certainly the dismay about the area bombing of civilians remains. Yet where in 1943 expressions of frustration and disappointment about the lack of official protest – particularly through the Church – were strongly evident, here an air of resignation seems to have settled over many diarists. Those who are critical of the attacks on Dresden tend to lament its destruction without going on to call for protest about the area bombing campaign. Chapter three showed how desires for channels of protest to be opened were not met and that some people admitted not feeling able to publically challenge Allied war conduct. The legacy, 18 months later, of this aspect of the response to the bombing of Hamburg is clear. With the end of the war in sight concerns remained a platform for acting on them was absent. The diaries of White and Goodwin are of similar tone. While it is not surprising that neither serviceman was outspoken about the actual method of attacking Dresden, both appear deeply affected by the dead bodies they came across, but do not explicitly stray into thoughts of anger.

It is worth here returning to the earlier quoted proposition from Martin Bell, who queried how Dresden would have looked to a satellite television audience. It seems certain that for some, the images would have been worthy of jubilation or at least satisfaction, especially once the discoveries of German atrocities had become common knowledge. Yet this discussion of responses to the Dresden attacks has shown that a section of British people would have shied away from such sentiments. The sense of sadness evident in a number of the diaries show that

⁶⁸⁸ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 361.

these people would not have seen reason for celebration. According to Richard Overy, the attacks on Dresden have “come to symbolise since 1945 the use of ‘excess force’ and the deliberate killing of civilians which it entailed.”⁶⁸⁹ Dresden has become a name widely associated with vast destruction. The questions asked and criticisms offered in the immediate aftermath – as outlined here – contributed to the creation of this symbolism.

Conclusion

Hindsight has not been kind to those who made the decision to bomb Dresden. But as this chapter has shown, it is not only with hindsight that the raids can be questioned. Max Hastings argued at the end of the 1970s that “the attacks on Dresden...aroused a revulsion even in the dying days of the war which has not been diminished by the passing of a generation.”⁶⁹⁰ Another generation has passed since he wrote these words, and still the subject forms a rich area for debate. Dresden remains a touchstone in debates on the nature of appropriate and proportionate conduct in war. The immediate reaction to the raids – variously of discomfort, horror and protest – effectively laid the path for a rigorous examination in the years after the war of the decision to bomb Dresden with such vigour. A. C. Grayling was right to state that: “Historians of the future will in part be guided by judgments we make now.” It is important therefore that these historians of the future are not guided by judgments which focus exclusively on how bad Dresden looks in hindsight. Knowledge and understanding of the uncomfortable immediate reaction at the time can make a full and enriching contribution to the way in which we now reflect on the bombings.⁶⁹¹

Dresden has taken on a symbolic position beyond that of a destroyed city. According to Waites and Emsley, In photographs of the aftermath: “we see not just ruins, but gratuitous

⁶⁸⁹ Overy, ‘The Post-War Debate’, 124.

⁶⁹⁰ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 340.

⁶⁹¹ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 1-2, and Russell, ‘Why Dresden Matters’, 165-166.

destruction and the degradation of the Allied cause”.⁶⁹² The perceived gratuitous destruction remains the great legacy of Dresden. As Paul Addison wrote: “Dresden has become a symbol for things greater than itself: the bombing of civilians; the horrors of total war; man’s inhumanity to man.”⁶⁹³ But it is also true that the second part – the degradation of the Allied cause – echoes through the concerns of many of those who criticised the attacks. From a vantage point sixty years on, it is possible to endorse Richard Stokes’ prediction that Dresden “will stand for all time as a blot upon our escutcheon.”⁶⁹⁴ According to Cecil H. King, the raids made “a nonsense of all our protestations about our war aims and about our bombing policy”.⁶⁹⁵ That “[t]he destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing” is as true now as it was when Winston Churchill sought to rein in the Bombing Offensive in late March 1945.⁶⁹⁶ The Allies’ cause was unarguably a just one. But Dresden represents the culmination of a bombing strategy which, certainly at this late stage in the war, could not be considered a vital part of the Allied strategy. Yet attacks continued, and in Dresden, “[t]he machine was up and running and had developed a momentum and logic all its own.”⁶⁹⁷ By continuing to attack urban centres, most devastatingly in Dresden, “the British, and to some extent the Americans, lost the moral high ground.”⁶⁹⁸ As A. C. Grayling advises, “civilised standards have to be made to apply even in severe situations, both for intrinsic reasons and because there is, properly, a reckoning always to come.” The reckoning began quickly after the raids took place, and the judgment does not reflect well on the decision to

⁶⁹² Bernard Waites and Clive Emsley, ‘The Nature and Causes of War’ in Arthur Marwick, Bernard Waites, Clive Emsley and John Golby, *War and Change in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990), 27.

⁶⁹³ Addison, ‘Retrospect’, 216.

⁶⁹⁴ Hansard (as above), Column 1901.

⁶⁹⁵ King, *With Malice Toward None*, 290.

⁶⁹⁶ TNA. CAB 120/303, Churchill to Chiefs of Staff, 28th March 1945..

⁶⁹⁷ Biddle, ‘Air Power’, 154.

⁶⁹⁸ Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 403.

bomb the city. The wide acceptance now that the bombing of Dresden could not be justified vindicates those who recorded their immediate concerns.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁹ Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 269; Probert, *Bomber Harris*, 317.

Conclusion

“It should not be too long now before the story of the bomber offensive is told to the public”.⁷⁰⁰ In October 1945, with victory in the Second World War secure, Sir Archibald Sinclair wrote these words to Squadron Leader A. Beale. Yet the account of this story remains contested; its changing narratives still at stake today.

In *The Secret History of the Blitz*, Joshua Levine describes the “consensus narrative” of British society under German bombs.⁷⁰¹ This represents a comfortable – and widely known – myth of British people pulling together and responding positively to the difficulties faced on international, national, local and personal levels. Levine, by his own admission, is not the first to question the extent to which this popular narrative accurately represents the period.⁷⁰² Angus Calder advocated the development of a more nuanced consideration and understanding of the period.⁷⁰³ British people did not all think and act alike during the Second World War. Levine suggests the possibility that: “we mistake nuance for weakness”.⁷⁰⁴ This thesis is an attempt to find such nuance, and to demonstrate the complexities that lie behind the very substantial support for the Allied war effort.

Wartime consensus of opinion did exist. There was a very high level of political, public and press support for the war against Nazi Germany. Yet this consensus was not absolute in its nature. It is important to recognise that opinions on the Allied bombing campaign, and in particular the area bombing of German cities, were not uniform.

⁷⁰⁰ Churchill College Archive, THRS VI 1/3. Sinclair to Squadron Leader A. Beale, 30th October 1945.

⁷⁰¹ Joshua Levine, *The Secret History of the Blitz*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 4-6.

⁷⁰² Levine does not dismiss the ‘myth’ of Blitz; rather he seeks to challenge some of its assumptions.

⁷⁰³ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*.

⁷⁰⁴ Levine, *The Secret History*, 4.

Through three case studies – each focusing on a very different stage of the war – this thesis charts and analyses the changing nature of attitudes to the bombing of German cities through the war. There is a strong focus on press reports and editorials which covered the progress of the war, as well as on the letters and diaries of British politicians, citizens and servicemen. By considering both of these broad source bases it has been possible to assess how attitudes and opinions were influenced by the availability of information, how personal thoughts on bombing were framed, and how opinions changed through the course of the war.

During the Blitz – particularly in the aftermath of the attack on Coventry and in the weeks before and after the raid on Mannheim – anti-bombing feeling was framed around the question of reprisals. Different newspapers took noticeably different stances on reporting public feeling in Britain. The *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* advocated a strong response to the attack on Coventry. This certainly struck a chord for those keen to know that German civilians were feeling the weight of war. Yet in local and national press the presence of reports which showed an absence of anger or malice gave a degree of legitimacy to the idea that reprisal attacks should not form a part of British policy. The divided nature of public opinion – as depicted by Mass Observation and BIPO – confirms a lack of consensus on this issue. Winston Churchill's speech in the summer of 1941 suggested near-total public support for the intention to meet and surpass the level of attack experienced by British civilians. The evidence analysed in this thesis contradicts Churchill's line and the reporting in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. People experiencing hardship and danger did not all expect similar treatment to be given to civilians in an enemy country. Over 43,000 people were killed by bombing in Britain between September 1940 and May 1941. Yet their neighbours and friends, many of whom were injured or saw their own homes destroyed, did not unanimously demand retribution. Some had feelings of empathy for their fellow civilians which overrode any desire for revenge. Others

were emboldened by their communities' ability to withstand bombardment and saw little value in trying break morale where their own had remained steadfast.⁷⁰⁵

These false assumptions and representations made during the Blitz set a dangerous precedent. The adoption of area bombing as an official policy in 1942 led to the growth in weight and scale of attacks on German cities. When Hamburg was attacked in the summer of 1943 Allied capacity for bombing raids exceeded the capabilities and priorities of the Luftwaffe. The Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing – succeeded by the Bombing Restriction Committee – aimed to publicise the horrors faced by civilians in Germany, and newspaper reports presented readers with clear evidence that German civilians were now experiencing far heavier attacks than British civilians had faced. As Andrew Knapp observes, evidence of this was available to the British public, who were “certainly in a position to know” about the far greater threats posed to German cities.⁷⁰⁶ This knowledge was neither clandestine nor restricted to the pages of niche publications. Popular daily newspapers, with a collectively huge circulation, gave prominent coverage to Allied attacks on German cities. The significantly reduced attacks on British cities, in association with other wartime developments, indicated that a turning point had been reached.⁷⁰⁷ The Mass Observation directive replies analysed here present a complex picture of attitudes at this stage. Many expressed concern or anger about the manner of the area bombing campaign. There is clear evidence to confirm what Knapp writes: that members of the British public understood the new scale on which Bomber Command was operating. For a large proportion of people this was to be celebrated. Yet a significant number of other people either did not support that fact or expressed strong reservations about it.

⁷⁰⁵ Gardiner, *The Blitz*, 184-185, 371-372.

⁷⁰⁶ Knapp, 'The Allied Bombing Offensive', 50.

⁷⁰⁷ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive, Volume II*, 146, 331-336; Overy, *The Bombing War*, 288-289.

By this stage a proportion of the British public was seeking to find an effective channel through which they could express their unease. The divided nature of reprisal feeling during the Blitz had developed into more explicit calls for restraint as the weight of bombs falling on German grew. Chapter three shows clearly that the Archbishop of Canterbury's lack of agreement with those who wrote to him served to effectively stifle a ripple of protest and prevent it gaining traction and further support. The dismay expressed by Denis Riley at Temple's inaction illustrates the frustration with which his lack of support was met. The absence of an effective focal point for protest about the bombing of German cities, and of a vocal and sufficiently influential leader for the campaign, was critical at this stage of the war. The concern around area bombing – and in some cases outright condemnation – was present in a number of circles by this stage. It did not gain sufficient momentum to have a limiting effect on the work of Bomber Command as the war progressed into its final years.⁷⁰⁸

Despite the lack of a leader of real influence, there remained a distinct undercurrent of dissent against the bombing campaign at the start of 1945. Mass Observation diarists who recorded their thoughts on the bombing of Dresden indicate clearly that even after over five years of war, they maintained the view that large-scale area attacks on cities could not be justified. The post-war controversy is founded on the immediate condemnation and negative appraisal which the operation received. Churchill's criticism of the decision to bomb Dresden came after the publication of lurid foreign press reports which informed, and were transmitted by, the British press. It was also preceded by indications of concern from prisoners of war who witnessed the attacks and their aftermath, and from members of the public back in Britain who heard about the results. The explicit calls for protest which had appeared around the attack on Hamburg seem to have subsided in the diary entries analysed here, yet profound

⁷⁰⁸ LAM: W. Temple Papers, Volume 57, Letters between Riley and Temple, 30th October 1943-13th November 1943.

discomfort remained. Richard Stokes' intervention in the House of Commons was only the most prominent expression of protest; it was supplemented by explicit dismay from others who did not have access to the same platform.

Wartime dissent against the area bombing of civilians in German cities existed in many forms throughout the Second World War. It is far from merely a post-war construction. This thesis shows the vital importance of promoting greater and wider awareness of the immediate reaction to events. The area bombing campaign came under such varied scrutiny as it took place as to raise serious doubts about its legitimacy, morality and public backing as it was still being carried out. Yet not until late-March 1945 did Winston Churchill act to rein in the method of attack. By this stage almost all of the German civilians killed by bombing attacks during the war were already dead.⁷⁰⁹

The findings outlined above pose a direct challenge to Brett Holman's argument that "the Blitz myth and the reprisals debate cannot coexist".⁷¹⁰ British people could and did lend the weight of their support to the Allied war effort while at the same time opposing attacks on civilians in German towns and cities. An appreciation and understanding of these nuances is vital if we are to fully understand the nature of British society during the Second World War. The evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates, very clearly, that certain decisions taken in relation to the aerial war against Nazi Germany were not unanimously backed by the British public. The extent to which there was protest, concern and discomfort about the *nature* of bombing policy was underplayed at the time and continues to be underestimated by historians today. Against Mark Connelly's search for the reasons British people had for supporting the bombing of German cities, it is at least as important to also recognise, assess and understand why others

⁷⁰⁹ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*; Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 283-328; Overly, *The Bombing War*, 474-477.

⁷¹⁰ Holman, 'Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard', 407. Holman's argument is discussed in the introduction to this thesis: see p. 11.

ideologically rejected that method of warfare. That this rejection began at a time when British civilians faced an uncertain future is worthy of far greater attention by historians. The texture of attitudes – accessible through thoughtful, substantial diary entries and letters – is of enormous value to a fuller understanding of anti-bombing sentiment.

A further form of misleading analysis of dissent against bombing policy persists. Connelly and others have argued that within the historiography, too great a weight of influence has been placed on the roles of prominent figures such as Vera Brittain and Bishop George Bell in discussion of anti-bombing feeling. Their views have been used, Connelly suggests, to exaggerate the extent of wider popular concern or protest about the area bombing campaign.⁷¹¹ This thesis proposes a different view. Brittain and Bell have certainly been touchstones in historiographical discussion of anti-bombing sentiment. By widening the scope to focus on a much broader section of British society, and giving only limited consideration to the roles played by more well-known figures, it has been possible to show clearly that such views and feelings were very much in evidence beyond these public figures, and to demonstrate the ways in which they were manifested.

Those members of the British population whose support for the war effort was qualified in some way by concern over the pursuance of increasingly heavy attacks on German civilians have, prior to now, been under-represented in the historiography. For this reason it has been possible to claim, as Patrick Bishop has done, that criticism of the area bombing campaign is luxury afforded by hindsight. The attacks culminated with the devastation of Dresden at time when, Bishop writes: “the end was not in sight. No one could know when the war would finish and in the middle of February 1945 there was no indication that the Germans would not fight on until the death of the last Nazi.”⁷¹² The weight of much recent historiography presents a

⁷¹¹ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, 3-4; Connelly, ‘The British People’, 39-40.

⁷¹² Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, 346-347.

stern challenge to this justification. Yet in key respects the debate over whether it was evident that the war was coming to an end is an exercise in misdirection. Many of those people whose views have been explored in depth in this thesis framed their doubts in moral terms throughout the war. For these individuals the assumed proximity to the end of the war was not a factor in recording their concern about attacks on German civilians. Even when the final outcome of the war was far from certain, and when British civilians suffered their own hardships under aerial bombardment, people argued that area attacks on German civilians could not be justified. Still others expressed strong misgivings about the nature of the campaign. This thesis has shown that these people – who broadly speaking supported the war against Nazi Germany – retained a clear sense of the way in which it should be waged, and did not support the bombing of civilians in German cities. Hindsight, and knowledge gained from research after the war, have given commentators the opportunity to question the morality and legality of the Allied bombing campaign, and such criticisms have nourished and sustained an enduring controversy. But we must not ignore the voices of those whose concerns stemmed from the events as they were taking place.

This development of British attitudes to the bombing of German civilians through the war presents a complex picture. It also has longer term consequences. There is little argument within a broad range of historiography that Winston Churchill's minute in late March – criticising area bombing attacks he himself had supported and encouraged – reflects poorly on him.⁷¹³ Frederick Taylor has suggested that condemnation of the Dresden raids may have influenced Winston Churchill's decision to question the legitimacy of the attacks.⁷¹⁴ As this chapter of the thesis shows, it is difficult to make an absolute case for this position. Yet it marks the point at which a thread of dissent against the policy of bombing German cities –

⁷¹³ See, for example, Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive; Volume III*, 112, Addison, Churchill, 197; Rose, *Churchill*, 274-275; Best, *Churchill*, 242.

⁷¹⁴ Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday*, 376.

fluid in its nature but present through the attacks on Mannheim, Hamburg and Dresden – coincided with Churchill's direct condemnation of a heavy raid. As this thesis has demonstrated, Churchill's pronouncement on the bombing of Germany in July 1941 was out of step with public opinion as he significantly overstated the extent of calls for reprisals. The effect of his 1945 minute was to row back on support for a bombing campaign which had provoked concern throughout the war: not just in the aftermath of the attack on Dresden. This move from cheerleader to arbiter came too late to have an effect on the major legacy of the area bombing campaign. The controversy over the Dresden bombing helped lead to the lack of memorial afforded to Bomber Command long into the post-war years. Winston Churchill's response to the attack sowed seeds of resentment between those men who risked their lives in service of Bomber Command and the leaders whom they served. The long wait for a permanent memorial did not end until 2012; the reasons for it began before VE Day. Yet this thesis clearly demonstrates that the expressions of protest, anger and dismay which followed the attack on Dresden – but preceded Churchill's minute – did not exist in isolation. Support for the bombing campaign did not suddenly decay with the bombing of Dresden: its levels varied through the war and it was subject to conditions. The post-war controversy owes as much to the growth of area bombing through the war as it does to the Dresden attack alone.⁷¹⁵

Existing historiography has not engaged on a sustained level with the wider aspects and expressions of anti-bombing sentiment discussed within this thesis. The work of A. C. Grayling, Donald Bloxham and others continues to give impetus to the debate over the bombing of civilians in German cities.⁷¹⁶ By addressing the views of people who have not previously been

⁷¹⁵ See, for example, Overy, *The Bombing War*, 641; BBC, 'Bomber Command Memorial moves veterans'. 28th June 2012. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18633791>; accessed 20th September 2014). For post-war expressions of disappointment about Churchill's fractured relationship with the men in Bomber Command, see for example Peter Johnson, *Withered Garland: Reflections and Doubts of a Bomber* (London: New European, 1995), 317-344. See also Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 65.

⁷¹⁶ Connelly, 'The British People', 39-40. See Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*; Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, Bloxham, 'Dresden as a War Crime'.

given a wider audience, and considering the conclusions which can be drawn from them, this thesis adds a new layer of discourse to the controversy over the area bombing campaign. It displays a more nuanced image of British opinion than has often been drawn. Notable condemnation and discomfort was expressed by a broad range of people. Within different sections of the disparate body that comprises British opinion there was an observable proportion of people who challenged the bombing campaign as it was taking place. This reaction manifested in many different ways, from private correspondence and diaries, through campaign groups, to discussion in the House of Commons and editorials in national newspapers. Collectively, the people who expressed them form an important minority in British wartime opinion. The responses were born in an atmosphere which was not broadly receptive to, or stimulating of, dissent against the bombing campaign. Often there was broad support for the bombing of Germany, but it is important to show that this was not universal.

There are clear complexities and nuances within the popular wartime consensus that conferred strong support to the Allied war effort. As Michele Haapamaki writes: “there are no easy generalizations about the wartime populace.”⁷¹⁷ It is not tenable to argue for the existence of a single common experience of war, even amongst the citizens of one country, and Sonya O. Rose rightly states that the people of Britain were not simply of “one mind”.⁷¹⁸ If we accept that the picture is far more complex, the challenge then is to apply this analysis to aspects of the war outside daily life and experiences on the home front. By addressing the bombing of German cities it is possible to illuminate an area of British wartime experience which further challenges the way we understand the “consensus narrative”.⁷¹⁹

That the strength of feeling did not develop into an effective, large-scale protest movement allowed the bombing offensive to gain momentum without such scrutiny as could check its

⁷¹⁷ Haapamaki, *The Coming of Aerial War*, 189.

⁷¹⁸ Rose, *Which People's War*, 8.

⁷¹⁹ Levine, *The Secret History*, 4-6.

growth. But by restoring the voices of those who challenged the nature of the campaign it is still possible to learn lessons about how wars are still waged today, and how military actions can be underpinned or undermined by wider attitudes. Of the post-war debate that area bombing has engendered, Tami Davis Biddle writes: “[w]e have questioned Hamburg and Dresden and Tokyo and Hiroshima, and this kind of informed questioning may be an important first step toward the development of a consensus on standards for the future.”⁷²⁰ It is vital that we understand how and why methods of warfare were debated as they were being carried out. By understanding specific concerns and the ways in which they are voiced – as well as the nature of qualified support for military action – governments and armed forces can more confidently formulate policy in a way that acknowledges and addresses public concerns.

In the autumn of 2014, the British government voted – by 524 votes to 43 – to begin bombing operations on ISIS targets in Iraq. It represented a large majority, but as an editorial in *the Guardian* noted: “[i]ts size masked the conditionalities and nuances which characterised much of the full day’s debate and most of the important speeches”. Reservations were expressed over the length of engagement and how the intervention will be framed and constrained. John Baron MP claimed that there is “no co-ordinated plan” while Dennis Skinner MP asked: “How long will this war last and when will mission creep start?” Prime Minister David Cameron replied: “This is going to be a mission that will take not just months but years. But I believe we have to be prepared for that commitment.”⁷²¹

⁷²⁰ Biddle, ‘Air Power’, 157.

⁷²¹ *The Guardian*, ‘MPs come together on an uncertain note’. 26th September 2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/26/parliament-iraq-mps-come-together-undertaun-note>; accessed 26th September 2014); *BBC*, ‘Islamic State air strikes: MP Baron votes against’. 26th September 2014 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-29385562>; accessed 26th September 2014); *The Guardian*, ‘RAF readies for Iraq bombing missions after MPs endorse action against Isis’. 26th September 2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/sep/26/parliament-uk-air-strikes-isis-iraq>; accessed 26th September 2014).

Memories of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan remain strong: the *Independent* reported the “unease” felt by veterans of those campaigns. One soldier, Stewart Harris, supported the move to begin bombing raids: “as long as they are reaching their real targets”.⁷²² Memories of these recent, ongoing conflicts still dominate discussion of British policy in the Middle East. But thoughts might also turn to the Second World War, even at a time when first-hand memories are fading. Dissent against a major aspect of the Allied campaign – the area bombing of civilians in German cities – was changeable in nature and extent. Yet it was also an ever-present strand of political, press and public opinion encompassing a wide range of views. The evidence analysed in this thesis and the conclusions drawn can inform the present-day debate and make a vital contribution to the way in which we understand the nature and nuance of support for military actions.

⁷²² *The Independent*, ‘War in Iraq: Veterans of last Iraq war uneasy as history repeats itself’. 27th September 2014 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/war-in-iraq-veterans-of-last-iraq-war-uneasy-as-history-repeats-itself-9758946.html>; accessed 27th September 2014).

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